



Learn about cancer tests and treatments

What tests do doctors use to find and diagnose cancer?

There are different tests doctors can use to find cancer in the body, diagnose the type of cancer, and find out whether it has spread (the stage). The test results can tell you about your type of cancer and treatments that may work best to treat it.



Blood tests

Blood tests may show cancer cells, proteins, or other substances made by cancer. They can also help doctors understand what else is happening in your body, such as how well your organs are working.



Imaging tests

Imaging tests, such as CT scans and MRIs, take pictures (images) of the inside of your body. Doctors use these tests to look for cancer, find out where it is located in your body, or to see if a cancer treatment is working.



Endoscopy

In this test, doctors use a thin tube with a camera and a light at its end to look inside your body. There are different types of endoscopies, such as colonoscopies to check for cancer in your colon (bowel).



Biopsy

During a biopsy, doctors take a sample of tissue from your tumor and look at it under a microscope.



Cytology

During a cytology, doctors take a sample of fluid from your body, such as urine (pee), spit, or spinal fluid (fluid from around your brain or spinal cord) and look at it under a microscope.

What are the most common treatments for cancer?

The type of cancer treatment you get depends on the type of cancer you have and whether it has spread in your body. You may get only one treatment or a combination of 2 or more treatments.



Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses medicines to destroy cancer cells and stop them from growing. It can shrink tumors before surgery or kill cancer cells that have spread in the body. However, chemotherapy also sometimes harms healthy cells, which can cause side effects, such as hair loss, feeling tired, or feeling sick to your stomach.



Surgery

Doctors use surgery to remove tumors from your body. Doctors can do surgery alone, or do surgery before or after other treatments. For example:

- Doctors may use another treatment to shrink your tumor **before** surgery
- Doctors may do surgery and then use another treatment **after** surgery to kill any cancer cells left in your body



Radiation therapy

Radiation therapy uses high beams of energy to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. Radiation can also damage healthy cells nearby the tumor. But the newest types of radiation therapy focus directly on the tumors to lessen the chance of harm to nearby healthy cells.



Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy works with your immune system (your body's system of cells, tissues, and organs that help fight disease) to help it destroy cancer cells.

Questions to ask your doctor about tests and treatments

Talk with your doctor to better understand and decide together about tests and treatments that you will get. Here are some questions you can ask:

Questions about tests

- What will this test tell us about my cancer?
- What side effects could I have from this test?
- Will I need other tests before we can decide on treatment?

Questions about treatments

- What are my treatment options?
- What treatment do you recommend and why?
- What's the goal of my treatment?
- What side effects could I have? How can I manage them?
- How often and how long will my treatment last?
- What happens if I do nothing?

To schedule a visit at Robert E. Hardy Cancer Center, call 615-341-4383



Nashville General Hospital

