

TREATMENT PLAN



The treatment decisions should be made after you have learned all you can about your diagnosis, prognosis and available treatment options. This can take time, depending on the type of cancer you have. It helps to learn more about the adverse effects from your treatment(s) before you begin, so you will know what to expect and discuss with your multidisciplinary health care team to manage your quality of life during and after treatment. Talk to your doctors about effective and readily available medications to address frequent adverse effects from cancer treatment (such as nausea, diarrhoea, constipation and mouth sores). Keep in mind that everyone reacts differently to treatment and experiences different adverse effects. Some coping mechanisms and strategies can help.

TREATMENT

There are several treatment options for stomach cancer. They depend on the cancer stage as well as the patient's age and general health. Patients have time to get a second or third opinion and to talk through all their options with their doctors to develop a treatment plan that best fits their needs. Many patients have one or more of the following:

1. **Surgery:** This is the most common treatment for stomach cancer. There are two main types of surgery for stomach cancer:
 - **Partial (subtotal) Gastrectomy:** The surgeon removes part of the stomach and may also remove part of the oesophagus or small intestine, nearby lymph nodes and other tissues.

- **Total Gastrectomy:** The surgeon removes the entire stomach, nearby lymph nodes, parts of the small intestine and oesophagus and other tissues. The spleen may also be removed in this surgery. The surgeon connects the oesophagus to the small intestine and makes a new "stomach" from intestinal tissue.

Many people who have stomach surgery feel tired or weak for a while. The surgery can cause constipation or diarrhoea, and a feeding tube may be used during recovery. Patients who have had a total gastrectomy can sometimes experience "dumping syndrome," where eating triggers the need to have a bowel movement or causes sweating and dizziness. Eating small meals more frequently can be helpful.

2. **Radiation Therapy:** A large machine directs radiation at the abdomen and uses high-energy rays to kill cancer cells. Radiation can be given alone or with chemotherapy, surgery or both. It is used to destroy cancer cells that remain after surgery and to relieve pain caused by cancer.

Adverse effects of radiation to the abdomen depend on dose and may include nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea or other problems with digestion. Radiation therapy may also cause fatigue that lasts for days to weeks after treatment is completed.

3. **Chemotherapy:** This treatment uses medicine to kill cancer cells. In patients with stomach cancer, chemotherapy is given alone, with surgery, radiation or both. Most often, medicine is injected into the veins.

Adverse effects depend on the specific medicine and the dose, and include hair loss, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue and mouth sores. In addition, certain chemotherapy medicines can cause numbness and tingling in the hands and feet.

Follow-up care after treatment for stomach cancer is an important part of the overall treatment plan. Even when there are no longer any signs of cancer, the disease sometimes returns because undetected cancer cells remained somewhere in the body after treatment.



ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STOMACH CANCER (GASTRIC CANCER)

WHAT IS STOMACH CANCER?

Stomach cancer, also called gastric cancer, is a form of cancer that occurs due to abnormal and uncontrolled cell growth in the lining of the stomach.

TYPES OF STOMACH CANCER

The most common type of stomach cancer is known as adenocarcinoma. Adenocarcinoma is responsible for about 90 percent of all cases of stomach cancer. These cancers develop from the cells that form the innermost lining of the stomach (the mucosa).

While adenocarcinoma is the most common type of stomach cancer, it is not the only type. There are other, rarer types of stomach cancer in which the treatment and prognosis may differ from that of adenocarcinomas. Other types of stomach cancer may include:

- **Gastric lymphomas:** These are cancers of the immune system tissue located in the stomach. The immune system protects the body against infection and disease.
- **Gastrointestinal stromal tumours:** Also known as GIST, these types of tumours can be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant. These tumours form from cells in the stomach muscles called interstitial pacemaker cells of a Cajal which control stomach muscle contractions.
- **Neuroendocrine tumours:** These tumours are a less common, slow-growing type of cancer that originates in the cells of the nervous system and endocrine system.

According to the World Health Organisation global cancer report for 2018, 1940 cases were reported in South Africa, with approximately 1573 deaths, making gastric cancer the fifteenth-most diagnosed cancer and the tenth deadliest cancer in the country.

You can help to change these odds by being aware of the risk factors and by watching out for the symptoms. While the exact causes of stomach cancer are not clear, factors that may increase the risk of stomach cancer include:

- A diet high in salty and smoked or braai foods
- A diet low in fruits and vegetables
- Family history of stomach cancer
- Infection with helicobacter pylori (H. pylori), which is a type of bacteria that lives in and affects the mucous lining of the stomach
- Chronic gastritis — long-term inflammation of the stomach
- Pernicious anaemia, where the intestines cannot properly absorb vitamin B12
- Smoking

TO REDUCE YOUR RISK OF STOMACH CANCER, YOU CAN:



Eat a healthy diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables, wholegrain foods and fish.



Reduce your consumption of fatty foods, red and processed meats.



Reduce the consumption of alcohol and stop smoking.



Participate in regular exercise.



Be aware of your medical conditions that may increase your risk of developing stomach cancers.

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STOMACH CANCER SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS:



THE SYMPTOMS OF STOMACH CANCER FOLLOW TWO DISTINCT STAGES:

- Early-stage stomach cancer symptoms
- Advanced stomach cancer symptoms

EARLY-STAGE STOMACH CANCER SYMPTOMS

It is common for people with early-stage stomach cancer to experience no symptoms. However, as stomach cancer grows and spreads, it exhibits some signs and symptoms, even while still in the early stages.

SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Abdominal pain or vague pain just above the belly button area
- Indigestion, heartburn or vomiting
- Loss of or decrease in appetite
- Weakness or fatigue
- Blood in vomit or stool
- A feeling of fullness after meals

Many symptoms of early-stage stomach cancer are also symptoms of less serious stomach issues. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, it is essential to see your doctor. The earlier gastric cancer is diagnosed, the more successfully it can be treated.

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ADVANCED STOMACH CANCER SYMPTOMS:



Symptoms of advanced stomach cancer are more severe than symptoms of early-stage stomach cancer. Because advanced-stage stomach cancer has grown and spread, it can also affect nearby organs, including:

- The liver
- The large intestine (also known as the colon)

If stomach cancer has grown to create a blockage within the stomach or the large intestine, you may experience:

- Loss of appetite
- Significant weight loss
- Uncontrolled vomiting
- Signs that stomach cancer has spread to the liver include:
 1. Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)
 2. Ascites (enlargement of the stomach from fluid)

If you experience any unexplained stomach or digestion symptoms, DO NOT DELAY — see your doctor for an expert diagnosis. A doctor may refer you to a gastroenterologist. This is a doctor who specialises in digestive problems.

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