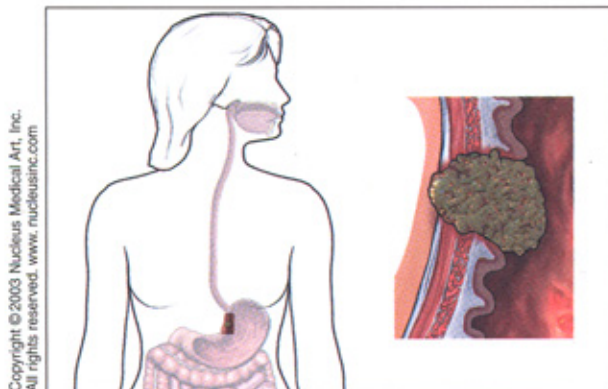


# Stomach Cancer

## Background Information

### Stomach Cancer



Stomach (gastric) cancer affects about two of every 10,000 people. Stomach cancer afflicts men twice as often as women, and it is more common among African-Americans. The diagnosis of stomach cancer is often delayed due to a lack of symptoms in its early stages and/or the self-treatment of symptoms. Risk factors for stomach cancer include the following:

- A family history of stomach (gastric) cancer
- A history of *Helicobacter pylori* gastritis
- A history of gastric polyps
- Decreased gastric acid

Symptoms of stomach cancer include the following:

- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty in swallowing
- Nausea
- Vomiting blood
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea
- Heartburn

The diagnosis of gastric cancer is established by the surgical pathologist by microscopic examination of a biopsy specimen. It is important to quickly and accurately evaluate the type and extent of gastric cancer. This type of cancer has the potential to spread to other organs, such as the regional lymph nodes, liver, pancreas and lungs. Your physician will recommend any additional testing needed to evaluate the cancer prior to treatment.

## Treatment options for stomach (gastric) cancer

(Only a physician can determine the best therapy to treat your condition.)

**Gastrectomy** is the surgical removal of a portion or all of the stomach. After a partial removal, the surgeon connects the remaining part of the stomach to the esophagus and the small intestine. After a total removal, the surgeon connects the esophagus directly to the small intestine. Lymph nodes near the tumor are also removed. The stomach tissue and the lymph nodes are then examined under a microscope by a surgical pathologist who will determine the type of cancer, the extent of spread (stage) and the completeness of excision.

**Chemotherapy** is the use of drugs to destroy cancer cells. This type of therapy is systemic because the drugs are sent directly through the bloodstream or are taken orally and travel throughout the entire body. Chemotherapy medication intervals will vary, depending upon the drug used and whether it is administered by injection, pill or intravenously (via a thin tube placed into a vein). Chemotherapy may be used to control a tumor, relieve symptoms or destroy cancer cells that remain in the body after surgery. Chemotherapy is currently under study (1) as a stand-alone therapy, (2) as part of a combination therapy prior to surgery (to shrink the tumor), and (3) for use in conjunction with radiation therapy. Chemotherapy is usually administered cyclically, with alternating treatment and recovery periods.



**Radiation Therapy**, which is normally administered in a hospital, is the use of high-energy rays to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. Similar to surgery, radiation therapy is focused directly upon the affected area. Physicians may also use radiation to shrink a tumor prior to surgery or to destroy remaining cancer cells after surgery. Radiation may come from an external source or may be implanted into or adjacent to a tumor, i.e., via the use of a radioisotope.

## Important questions to ask your doctor

- What is the stage of my stomach (gastric) cancer?
- What is the best treatment option?
- What are the risks and side effects of this treatment option?
- What can I do to take care of myself during and after treatment?
- How long will the treatment last, and what will be my follow-up?
- To whom may I turn for nutritional and dietary information?

## Sources of additional information

**American College of Gastroenterology** 703/820-7400 • [www.acg.gi.org](http://www.acg.gi.org)  
Patient education brochures, current clinical updates and late-breaking news

**American Gastroenterological Association** 301/654-2055  
[www.gastro.org/public/digestinfo/html](http://www.gastro.org/public/digestinfo/html)  
Access to expert panels, support groups and detailed diagnostic and treatment information

**National Institutes of Health** [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)  
Patient education information, late-breaking clinical trial news and clinical updates

**Pharmaceutical Information Network** [www.pharminfo.com/disease/gastro/html](http://www.pharminfo.com/disease/gastro/html)  
Access to articles, research news and discussion groups on many gastrointestinal disorders



**Associated Pathology Medical Group, Inc.**

[www.apmglab.com](http://www.apmglab.com) or 800-848-2764