



# Treatment of Cancer

There are three major methods of treating cancers - surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Sometimes a combination is used.

## Surgery

The purpose of surgery is to remove the cancer and any affected neighbouring tissue. Surgery is carried out when there is a reasonable chance of removing all the cancer. Cancers close to vital organs such as the heart, brain or liver cannot generally be removed.

The cure rate with surgery depends on the type of cancer and whether it is an early growth. If cancer has spread to other organs, the primary cancer is often removed by surgery and the secondary cancers treated with other therapy.

## Radiation therapy

Radiation therapy is the treatment of cancer by radiation usually x-rays. High-energy rays are used to kill cancer cells by preventing them from reproducing. There are different types of radiation therapy and the type chosen depends on the sort of cancer.

## Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is the use of special (cytotoxic) drugs to treat cancer by slowing the growth of cancer cells or killing them. Some are natural drugs, similar to antibiotics. Others are synthetic drugs. Because anti-cancer drugs enter the bloodstream and circulate through the body, they can kill cancer cells which have spread to distant parts of the body.

They kill these cells by interfering with their life-cycle. Different drugs attack cells at different points in their growth, so often several drugs are combined.

Chemotherapy is often used in combination with surgery, or in place of surgery on cancers that cannot be surgically removed. It is used to treat cancers present throughout the body, such as leukaemia. In general, chemotherapy is best for treating cancers that are growing rapidly.

Chemotherapy drugs are very powerful and may have serious side effects.

## Other treatments

### Hormones

Hormones are chemicals produced by glands in the body. Some cancers can be treated by adding hormones. Others are treated by stopping the action of the body's own hormones.

### Immunotherapy

Researchers are studying drugs or substances normally produced in the body which can stimulate the immune system to fight the disease itself.

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