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## Advanced and Metastatic Cancer

Advanced cancers are not usually curable, but can be treatable. Symptom management is also an important part of treatment for advanced cancer.

- [Understanding Advanced and Metastatic Cancer](#)
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## Understanding Advanced and Metastatic Cancer

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- [Possible symptoms of advanced and metastatic cancer](#)

If you or a loved one is told that you have advanced cancer, it's very important to find out exactly what it is and how to manage it. If you or a loved one is told that you have advanced cancer, it's very important to find out exactly what it is and how to manage it.

doctor is talking about and what it means for you.

## What is advanced cancer?

Advanced cancer is most often used to describe cancers that cannot be cured. This means cancers that won't totally go away and stay away completely with treatment. However, some types of advanced cancer can be controlled over a long period of time and are thought of as an ongoing (or chronic) illness.

Even if advanced cancer can't be cured, treatment can sometimes:

- Shrink the cancer
- Slow its growth
- Help relieve symptoms
- Help you live longer

For some people, the cancer may already be advanced when they first learn they have the disease. For others, the cancer may not become advanced until years after it was first diagnosed.

Advanced cancers can be locally advanced or metastatic.

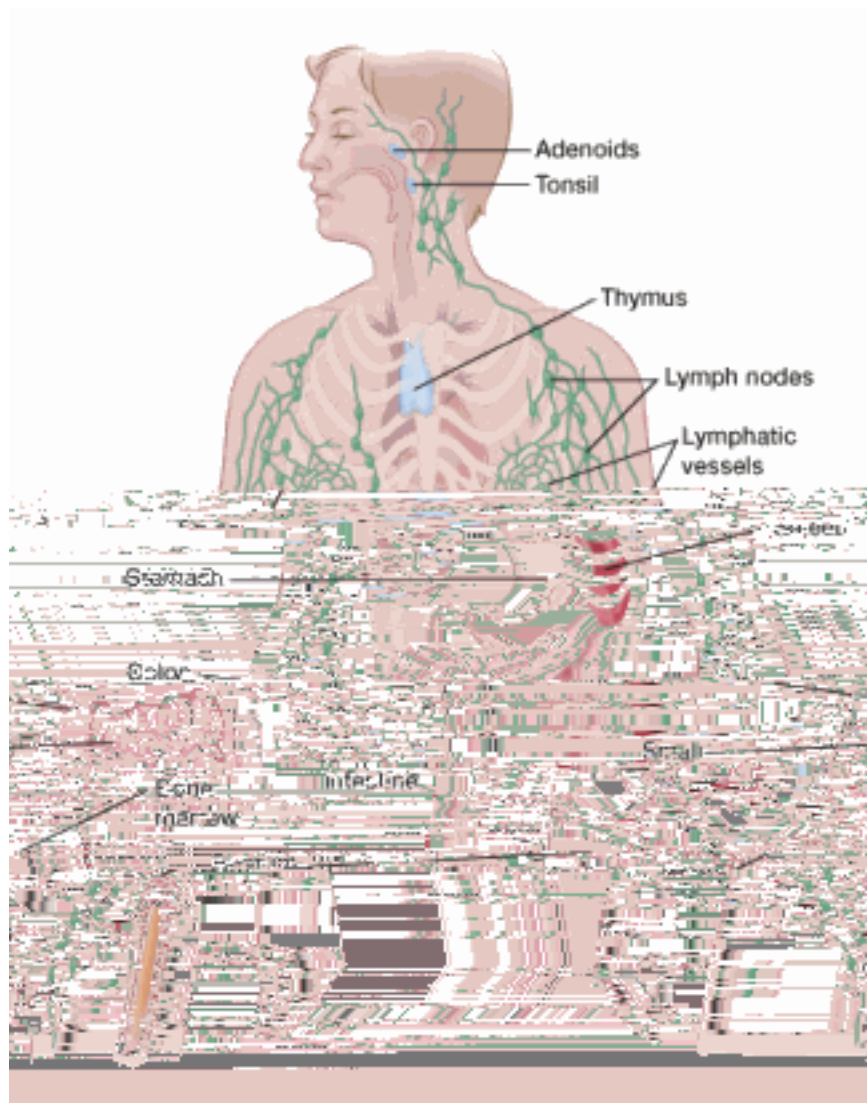
**Locally advanced** means that cancer has grown outside the body part it started in but has not yet spread to other parts of the body. For example, some cancers that start in the brain may be considered advanced because of their large size or closeness to important organs or blood vessels. This can make them life-threatening even though they haven't spread to other parts of the body. But other locally advanced cancers, such as some prostate cancers, may be cured.

**Metastatic cancers** have spread from where they started to other parts of the body. Cancers that have spread are often thought of as advanced when they can't be cured or controlled with treatment. Not all metastatic cancers are advanced cancers. Some cancers, such as [testicular cancer](#)<sup>1</sup>, can spread to other parts of the body and still be very curable.

As advanced cancer grows, it can cause [symptoms](#). These symptoms can almost always be managed with treatment, even when the cancer itself no longer responds to treatment.

## What is metastatic cancer?

Metastatic cancer is a cancer that has spread from the part of the body where it started (the primary site) to other parts of the body. When cancer cells break away from a tumor, they can travel to other parts of the body through the bloodstream or the lymph system. (Lymph vessels are much like blood vessels, except they carry a clear fluid and immune system cells.)



This image shows some parts of the lymph system, like lymph nodes and lymph vessels, as well as organs and tissues that contain many lymphocytes (immune cells).

If the cells travel through the lymph system, they could end up in nearby lymph nodes (small, bean-sized collections of immune cells) or they could spread to other organs. More often, cancer cells that break off from the main tumor travel through the bloodstream. Once in the blood, they can go to any part of the body. Many of these cells

die, but some may settle in a new area and start to grow.

Cancer cells must go through several steps to spread to new parts of the body:

- They must find ways to break away from the original tumor and enter the bloodstream or lymph system.
- They need to attach to the wall of a blood or lymph vessel and move into a new body part.
- They need to find ways to grow and thrive in their new location.
- They must be able to avoid attacks from the body's immune system.

When cancer spreads to a new area, it's still named after the part of the body where it started. For instance, breast cancer that has spread to the lungs is called "metastatic breast cancer to the lungs" – it's not lung cancer. Treatment is also based on where the cancer started. If prostate cancer spreads to the bones, it's still prostate cancer (not bone cancer), and the doctor will choose treatments that have been shown to help against metastatic prostate cancer. Likewise, colon cancer that has spread to the liver is treated as metastatic colon cancer, not liver cancer.

Sometimes the metastatic tumors have already begun to grow when the cancer is first found. And sometimes, a metastasis may be found before the original (primary) tumor is found. If a cancer has already spread to other parts of the body before it's first diagnosed, it may be hard to figure out where it started.

## **Why cancer cells tend to spread to the parts of the body they do**

Where a cancer starts is linked to where it will spread. Most cancer cells that break free from the primary tumor are carried in the blood or lymph system until they get trapped in the next "downstream" organ or set of lymph nodes. This explains why breast cancer often spreads to underarm lymph nodes, but rarely to lymph nodes in the belly. Likewise, there are many cancers that commonly spread to the lungs. This is because the heart pumps blood from the rest of the body through the lungs' blood vessels before sending it elsewhere.

## **Possible symptoms of advanced and metastatic cancer**

General signs and symptoms of advanced and metastatic cancer can include:

- Loss of energy and feeling tired and/or weak: This can get so bad that you may

have a hard time doing everyday tasks like bathing or getting dressed. People with advanced cancer often need help with these things.

- Weight loss (without trying)
- Pain
- Shortness of breath or trouble breathing

Advanced and metastatic cancers can cause many other [symptoms](#)<sup>2</sup>, depending on the type of cancer and where it has spread.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/testicular-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/testicular-cancer.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html)

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Last Revised: September 10, 2020

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# Managing Advanced Cancer

- [Making treatment choices](#)

- [Managing symptoms of advanced cancers](#)

Many advanced cancers can't be cured, but they can most often be treated. You should know if the goal of treatment is to cure the cancer, slow its growth and help you live longer, or relieve symptoms. Even if the goal is not to cure the cancer, physical symptoms can be managed most of the time.

## **Making treatment choices**

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supportive care.

You might have many symptoms when cancer is in different parts of your body. Not everyone will get all of these symptoms. In many cases, these symptoms are not caused directly by the cancer or can have more than one cause. Your cancer care team can tell you the most about where the cancer is and what symptoms it might cause.

Common symptoms that are treated and controlled or relieved by palliative care can include the following:

- [Pain](#)<sup>9</sup>
- [Depression and anxiety](#)<sup>10</sup>
- [Fatigue and weakness](#)<sup>11</sup>
- [Loss of appetite](#)<sup>12</sup>
- [Weight changes](#)<sup>13</sup>
- [Nausea and vomiting](#)<sup>14</sup>
- [Constipation](#)<sup>15</sup>
- [Belly swelling \(ascites\)](#)<sup>16</sup>

Cancer that has spread to certain parts of the body such as the [brain](#), [bone](#), [liver](#), and [lungs](#) may cause other symptoms. You can find more information about these metastases in other pages in this section.

Again, the goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering and support the best possible quality of life for patients and their families, regardless of the stage of the disease.

Other symptoms you may have include shortness of breath and bowel and kidney blockages. These are very serious situations and require treatment right away.

### **Shortness of breath (dyspnea)**

Shortness of breath is one of the most common symptoms that people with advanced cancer can have. Shortness of breath can have many causes. It can be caused by cancer or cancer treatment. It may also be caused by other problems such as [infection](#)<sup>17</sup>, [low blood counts](#)<sup>18</sup>, or other lung conditions.

Being short of breath can be very troubling. It can limit what people are able to do and can make [fatigue](#)<sup>19</sup>, [anxiety](#)<sup>20</sup>, and [depression](#)<sup>21</sup> worse. Not everyone whose cancer has advanced will become short of breath, but it helps to know what to expect, when to call

your doctor, and how it might be managed.

Shortness of breath can happen quickly or build over time. If you have [shortness of breath](#)<sup>22</sup> that comes on quickly, be sure to call your doctor right away. This may be caused by a problem that needs to be treated as soon as possible.

**Call 911 if new shortness of breath starts suddenly and doesn't get better; your skin, mouth, or nail beds look pale or blue in color; or if you have chest pain or pressure, trouble speaking, dizziness, or weakness.**

For many people with advanced cancers, shortness of breath comes on over time rather than quickly. It may get better then get worse again but doesn't totally go away. For many people, shortness of breath gets worse with certain movement or activity.

Managing shortness of breath depends on the cause. Talk to your cancer care team about what you might be able to do to help, and if there are treatments that might work for you.

If you have talked with your doctor and don't need to immediately be seen or treated for shortness of breath, there are things that can help make you more comfortable.

- Set up a fan so that it is directed at your cheek.
- Sit up or raise your upper body to a 45° angle by raising the bed or using pillows behind your back.

Inhale deeply through your nose and exhale slowly through puckered



Cancer in the abdomen (belly) sometimes blocks the bowels. The blockage (obstruction) keeps food and stool from moving through. This leads to severe cramping, belly pain, and throwing up. If the blockage in the bowels isn't opened, the pressure that builds up can create a hole (a perforation) that lets the contents of the intestine spill into the abdomen. Bacteria from the intestine can cause a severe infection. This can cause even worse pain, and nausea and vomiting. An obstruction is very serious and must be treated right away.

It can be hard to treat obstructions with surgery because many patients are too sick. Other times the cancers are so large that surgery may not help for long. The risks of surgery should be compared to the chances of returning to a comfortable life.

If the bowel is blocked in only one area, a small, stiff tube called a stent may be put through the blocked area to help keep it open. This can be done without surgery and may be an option for some blockages of the colon and the small intestine.

If a stent won't work operations called [colostomies](#)<sup>24</sup> or [ileostomies](#)<sup>25</sup> may help. The surgeon cuts the large or small bowel above the block. The cut end is then connected to an opening (stoma) on the skin of the abdomen (belly). Stool then comes out into a bag that's put around the opening.

If surgery or stents aren't practical, treatment of the symptoms may be the good choice. For instance, the stomach's contents can be removed through a tube placed through the nose, down the throat, and into the stomach. (This called a nasogastric or NG tube.) The NG tube is attached to a suction device to gently take out the contents of the stomach. This often relieves nausea and vomiting and may help keep pressure from building up and causing other proareneated right away.

In many cases, a small, stiff tube called a stent can be threaded up from the bladder and through the ureters to keep them open and let urine flow again. Another option is to put a tube through the skin and right into the kidney to allow the urine to drain into a bag outside the body. This is called a nephrostomy.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/targeted-therapy.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/hormone-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/hormone-therapy.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html)
8. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/palliative-care.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/palliative-care.html)
9. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain.html)
10. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html)
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12. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/poor-appetite.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/poor-appetite.html)
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14. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/nausea-and-vomiting.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/eating-problems/nausea-and-vomiting.html)
15. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/stool-or-urine-changes/constipation.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/stool-or-urine-changes/constipation.html)
16. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/swelling/ascites.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/swelling/ascites.html)
17. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/infections.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/infections.html)
18. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/low-blood-counts.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/low-blood-counts.html)
19. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/fatigue.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/fatigue.html)
20. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/anxiety.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/anxiety.html)
21. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/depression.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/depression.html)
22. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/shortness-of-breath.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/shortness-of-breath.html)

23. [www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/practice-mindfulness-and-relaxation.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/practice-mindfulness-and-relaxation.html)
24. [www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/self-management.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/self-management.html)
25. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies/colostomy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies/colostomy.html)
26. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies/ileostomy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/surgery/ostomies/ileostomy.html)

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# Bone Metastases

- [Signs and symptoms of bone metastases](#)
- [How are bone metastases found?](#)
- [Drugs to treat bone metastases](#)

When cancer cells spread to the bones (bone metastases), they can cause many problems such as pain, broken bones, or more serious problems. Almost all cancers can spread to the bone, but cancers that often spread there include [breast](#)<sup>1</sup>, [lung](#)<sup>2</sup>,

[prostate](#)<sup>3</sup>, [kidney](#)<sup>4</sup>, [melanoma](#)<sup>5</sup>, [ovarian](#)<sup>6</sup>, and [thyroid](#)<sup>7</sup>. The spine is the most common site for bone metastases. Other common sites are the hip bone (pelvis), upper leg bone (femur), upper arm bone (humerus), ribs, and the skull.

Normally, bone is maintained by 2 kinds of bone cells.

- Osteoblasts form new bone
- Osteoclasts break down old bone

When these cells are both working the way they should, new bone is always forming while old bone is being broken down. This helps keep the bones strong.

When cancer cells spread to the bone, they block or speed up the action of the osteoblasts and osteoclasts, too much bone is broken down or too much bone is made. Either of these changes can make bones break easier than normal.

Bone metastases (mets) can cause other problems as well:

- When cancer spreads to the bones of the spine, it can press on the spinal cord. This can cause nerve damage that **may lead to paralysis if not treated right away**.  
As too much bone dissolves, calcium is released into the blood. This can lead to problems caused by high blood calcium levels (hypercalcemia).





affected kidneys and medicines such as bisphosphonate drugs (see below) to bring blood calcium levels down quickly. Once the calcium level is back to normal, treating the cancer can help keep the calcium level from getting too high again.

## How are bone metastases found?

Bone mets may be seen on imaging tests that take pictures of the body. Some common imaging tests used to check for bone mets include:

- X-ray
- CT or CAT scan
- MRI
- PET scan
- Bone scan

Bone mets may be found because a person is having pain, or if the doctor is looking to see if the cancer has spread anywhere else in the body. Sometimes, a bone biopsy may also be done.

## Drugs to treat bone metastases

The drugs used most often for treating bone problems in people with bone metastases are the bisphosphonate drugs **pamidronate (Aredia)** and **zoledronic acid (Zometa)** and the drug **denosumab (Xgeva)**. These drugs are given intravenously (IV or into a vein) or subcutaneously (under the skin). Most patients are treated once a month at first, but may be able to be treated less often later on if they are doing well. Treatment with one of these drugs can help prevent further bone damage and events related to weakened bones such as fractures, hypercalcemia, and spinal cord compression.

These treatments can have a rare but serious side effect called osteonecrosis of the jaw (ONJ). Patients complain of pain and doctors find that part of the jawbone has died. This can lead to an open sore that doesn't heal or tooth loss in that area. The jawbone can also become infected. Having jaw surgery or having a tooth removed can trigger this problem. It is best to avoid these procedures while you are taking one of these medicines. One way to avoid these dental procedures is to maintain good oral hygiene by flossing, brushing, making sure that dentures fit properly, and having regular dental checkups. Any tooth or gum infections should be treated right away. (Dental fillings, root

Your doctor will probably recommend that you have a dental checkup before starting treatment. That way, any dental problems can be taken care of before starting the drug. They might also recommend taking calcium and Vitamin D supplements while on the medicine to help your body build bone.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/lung-cancer.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/prostate-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/prostate-cancer.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/kidney-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/kidney-cancer.html)
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# Brain Metastases

- [Symptoms of brain metastases](#)
- [Treatment of brain metastases](#)

Brain metastases develop most often in people with lung cancer, breast cancer, and melanoma, but also with other types of cancer. Brain metastases can be found at the same time as the primary cancer or later.

Anti-seizure medicines may also be used if a patient has had a seizure. This can help prevent more seizures.

[Radiation therapy](#)<sup>1</sup> is often used to manage brain metastases and control symptoms. For people with several brain metastases or meningitis from cancer, whole brain radiation can be used. This can help improve symptoms and prevent them from getting worse.

Surgery is also sometimes used to treat brain metastases, especially if there are no more than three spots. For some people, a specialized procedure called [stereotactic radiosurgery](#)<sup>2</sup> may be used. Either procedure is most often followed by whole brain radiation therapy for the best results.

Chemotherapy is not usually a treatment for brain metastases because these medicines have a hard time getting into the brain. However, for people with meningitis from cancer, chemotherapy may be injected right into the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. This can be done during a lumbar puncture (needle into the back) or through a device called an [Ommaya reservoir](#).<sup>3</sup>

An Ommaya reservoir is a dome-like device that is placed under the skin of the head and accessed with a needle. If the patient has an Ommaya reservoir, they can get chemo into the fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord without having to get repeated lumbar punctures.

For a few types of cancer, there are new medicines that can get into the brain when given into a vein. Your cancer care team will let you know if this treatment is an option for you.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/brain-spinal-cord-tumors-adults/treating/radiation-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/brain-spinal-cord-tumors-adults/treating/radiation-therapy.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation/external-beam-radiation-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation/external-beam-radiation-therapy.html)
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Last Revised: September 10, 2020

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## Liver Metastases

- [Symptoms of liver metastases](#)
- [Treatment of liver metastases](#)

The liver is a common site for metastases from many cancer types. Cancers that spread to the liver most often are colorectal cancer as well as with breast, esophageal, stomach, pancreatic, lung, kidney and melanoma skin cancers.

### Symptoms of liver metastases

Cancer in the liver can cause different symptoms based on how much of the liver is involved. Some common symptoms include

- Loss of appetite
- Feeling tired or weak
- Fever
- Itchy skin
- Yellowing of the whites of the eyes or skin (jaundice)
- Bloating belly
- Leg swelling

- Pain in the upper right part of the abdomen (belly) (less common)

If there are a lot of metastases in the liver and it can't work well, people can get a condition called **hepatic encephalopathy**. This can cause confusion, sleepiness, and even coma.

## Treatment of liver metastases

Surgery to remove the metastases may be an option if there are a small number of tumors in the liver and they are not in areas that would affect normal liver function. A different procedure called [ablation](#)<sup>1</sup> might also be an option. In ablation, a thin needle is put into the tumor. The treatment (such as a high energy current) is passed through the needle to destroy the cancer cells.

[Radiation therapy](#)<sup>2</sup> may also be an option for treating liver metastases. This may involve radiation to the whole liver. Or if there are a small number of metastases, a specialized procedure called [stereotactic radiosurgery](#)<sup>3</sup> may be used.

Chemotherapy may be used for certain kinds of cancer. This may be given into a vein in your arm or right into a blood vessel leading to the liver.

Sometimes a procedure can be done to block the blood supply to the cancer. This is called [embolization](#)<sup>4</sup>.

If a person has hepatic encephalopathy, treatment will depend on how severe symptoms are. A person who is confused, sleepy, or in a coma will likely be treated with medicines such as lactulose, lactitol, or rifaximin. These medicines decrease the level of one of the toxins (ammonia) that can build up in the blood.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types/liver-cancer/treating/tumor-ablation.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/liver-cancer/treating/tumor-ablation.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation/external-beam-radiation-therapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation/external-beam-radiation-therapy.html)
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## Lung Metastases

site) the person has. Treatment may include [chemotherapy](#),<sup>1</sup> [immunotherapy](#)<sup>2</sup> or [radiation therapy](#),<sup>3</sup> or a combination of these.

Surgery may be an option if there are a small number of lung metastases and there are no metastases in other parts of the body. Also, surgery would only be used if the main cancer is under control.

Controlling symptoms is important, especially if treatment for the main cancer is not effective or may take a while to help. [Shortness of breath](#)<sup>4</sup> can be one of the hardest feelings to deal with. Morphine-like medicines (opioids) can be used to help decrease the feeling of shortness of breath. Anti-anxiety medicines may be helpful if the morphine-like medicines don't work.

Having trouble breathing can make you feel [anxious](#)<sup>5</sup>, worried, and even like you are in a panic. Some patients find the steps below helpful.

- [Relaxation methods](#)<sup>6</sup>
- Distraction (watching television, reading, etc.)
- A fan blowing cool air on you

[Pain](#)<sup>7</sup> can also be hard to deal with, especially if you have other symptoms. Talk to your healthcare team about how you can use medicines and supportive methods to treat your pain.

**Pleural effusion** (build up of fluid around the lungs) can sometimes happen when there is cancer in the lungs. The fluid can keep the lungs from filling with air and make you short of breath. If a pleural effusion causes symptoms, the usual treatment is antibiotics and draining the fluid (called a thoracentesis) using a small tube. This may need to be done more than once before the fluid stops building up. If the fluid keeps coming back, a procedure to seal the space around the lung may be tried. Or a tube that can be left in place for a longer time may be placed.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/chemotherapy.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/immunotherapy.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/radiation.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/shortness-of-breath.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/shortness-of-breath.html)

5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/anxiety.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/anxiety.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain/cancer-pain/non-medical-treatments-for-cancer-pain.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/pain/cancer-pain/non-medical-treatments-for-cancer-pain.html)
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# Coping with Advanced and Metastatic Cancer

- [Making treatment decisions about advanced cancer](#)

- [Facing family issues](#)
- [Finding hope](#)
- [Finding support](#)

Living with advanced cancer can be very different for each person. It is important to understand what you can expect with your \_\_\_\_\_



cancer therapy. Palliative care can be provided at the same time to control symptoms of the cancer and the treatment.

For some, the best option may be to not get more treatment and instead focus on having the best quality for the rest of their lives. Palliative care can be very helpful in managing symptoms, dealing with the feelings about having cancer, and handling concerns about death. When a person nears the end of their life, a transition is often made to [hospice](#)<sup>5</sup>.

What is most important is that each person makes the [best decision for themselves](#)<sup>6</sup>. It is essential to understand your options and decide what is best for you.

The needs of family members and caregivers are important, too. See our information for caregivers and family or call us to learn more.

## **Finding hope**

Hope is an important part of everyday life. Hope gets many of us out of bed in the

## Support from a counselor

If you have ongoing feelings that interfere with your life, or if you just want to communicate and cope the best you can, consider talking with a mental health professional. It can often be very helpful to talk with an expert. Social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners are all licensed mental health professionals. These counselors can be especially helpful if you are struggling with anxiety,<sup>12</sup> distress or depression.

You can find one by asking your cancer care team or through the nearest large hospital in your area. Even one session with a licensed mental health provider may help you and your family focus on what matters most. Your cancer care team can work with you to find [the right provider for you](#)<sup>13</sup>.

## Support programs

Support programs come in all kinds of forms and include one-on-one or group counseling and support groups. A support group can be a powerful tool for patients and families. Talking with others who are in situations like yours can help ease loneliness. You can speak without feeling judged. And you can often get useful ideas from others that might help you. The American Cancer Society can help you find [many different support programs in your community](#).<sup>14</sup>

Some groups are formal and focus on learning about cancer or dealing with feelings. Others are informal and social. Some groups include only people with cancer or only caregivers, while others include spouses, family members, or friends. Some groups focus on specific types of cancer or stages of disease. The length of time groups meet can range from a certain number of weeks to an ongoing program. Some programs have closed membership and others are open to new, drop-in members. For those who cannot attend meetings or appointments, phone counseling is offered by some organizations.

[Online groups](#)<sup>15</sup> are another option. Some people find online support groups helpful because they like the privacy it can offer. It may be comforting to chat with other people in situations much like yours, without having to share any more than you want to. But it's important to remember that chat rooms and message boards are not the best source of medical information, especially if they are not monitored by trained professionals or experts. Each person's situation is unique, and what helps one person might not be right for someone else.

Support in any form allows you to discuss your feelings and develop coping skills. Studies have found that people who take part in support programs often have an

improved quality of life, including better sleep and appetite.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/types.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/types.html)
2. [www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/staging.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/diagnosis-staging/staging.html)
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4. [www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/cancer-as-a-chronic-illness.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/cancer-as-a-chronic-illness.html)
5. [www.cancer.org/cancer/end-of-life-care.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/end-of-life-care.html)
6. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/distress.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes/distress.html)
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13. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html)
14. [www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/emotional-mood-changes.html)
15. [www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/understanding-psychosocial-support-services.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/coping/understanding-psychosocial-support-services.html)
16. [www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services.html](http://www.cancer.org/support-programs-and-services.html)
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