



The Oesophageal Patients Association

Caring for the cancer patient and their family

Confused by medical terminology? No more – here's our jargon-buster

GLOSSARY OF RELEVANT MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY

Ablation	The removal or destruction of a body part or tissue or its function. Ablation may be performed by surgery, hormones, drugs, radiofrequency, heat or other methods
Adenocarcinoma (AC)	The most common type of cancer which occurs at or near the junction of the oesophagus and the stomach
Adenopathy	Large or swollen lymph glands
Adjuvant treatment	Additional treatment, such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy given after surgery
Advanced Cancer	When cancer cells spread from where they first grew to other parts of the body. Also known as metastasis or secondary cancer. This can also be when the cancer attaches itself to adjacent organs
Anaesthesia, anaesthetics	Drugs or gases given before and during surgery so that the patient will not feel pain. The patient may be awake (local anaesthetic) or asleep (general anaesthetic)
Anastomosis	A connection made surgically between adjacent blood vessels, parts of the intestine, or other channels of the body, or the operation in which this is constructed
Barrett's Oesophagus	A condition in which the cells lining the lower part of the oesophagus have changed or been replaced with abnormal cells that could lead to cancer of the oesophagus. The backing up of stomach contents (reflux) may irritate the oesophagus and over time, cause Barrett's oesophagus.
Benign	Tumour that is not malignant or condition that does not produce harmful effects
Biopsy	One of the main tests used to diagnose cancer. A piece of body tissue is taken so that cells can be looked at under a microscope
Blood Cells	Cells that make up the blood. There are three main types – red blood cells (which carry oxygen around the body), white blood
Brachytherapy	The placement of a radioactive source on or inside a tumour
Cancer	1. Cancer is present when the normal division of cells gets out of control and invades healthy tissue. 2. Cancer – general term to describe a collection of diseases



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Carcinoma	A type of cancer which begins in the lining or covering of an organ
Chemotherapy	A drug treatment usually with anticancer drugs. A course of treatment usually takes several months
Chemoradiotherapy	Treatment that combines chemotherapy with radiation therapy. Also called chemoradiation
Consultant	A senior doctor
CT Scan (CAT Scan), CT Scans	Computer Aided Tomography scan. X-Ray scan using a computer to construct pictures of the body in cross section and 3D body images
Dietitian	A specialist in nutrition in the field of oncology and specialist surgery
Dumping Syndrome	A condition that occurs when food or liquid moves too fast into the small intestine. Symptoms include cramps, nausea, diarrhoea, sweating, weakness, and dizziness. Dumping syndrome sometimes occurs in people who have part of their stomach removed
Dysphagia, Dysplasia	Difficulty or discomfort when swallowing. Cells that look abnormal under a microscope but are not yet cancerous. Abnormal cells which if left untreated could develop into cancer
Endoscopy	A procedure that uses an endoscope to examine the inside of the body. An endoscope is a thin, tube-like instrument with a light and a lens for viewing. It may also have a tool to remove tissue to be checked under a microscope for signs of disease
Hepatobiliary (HPB)	“Hepato-” refers to the liver and “-biliary” refers to the gallbladder, bile ducts, or bile
Hickman Line	A special tube put in under anaesthetic through the chest wall into a large vein, so that chemotherapy drugs can go directly into the bloodstream
HPB Dietitian	Hepatobiliary dietitian
ICU/ITU	An intensive care unit (ICU) , also known as an intensive therapy unit or intensive treatment unit (ITU) or critical care unit (CCU), is a special department of a hospital or health care facility that provides intensive treatment medicine.
<i>In situ</i>	The earliest stage of cancer, when it has not spread to any other organ or area of the body
Immunotherapy	Also called biologic therapy, is a type of cancer treatment that boosts the body's natural defenses to fight cancer. It uses substances made by the body or in a laboratory to improve or restore immune system function.



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Jejunostomy tube, (JEJ tube)	A feeding tube normally inserted during an oesophagectomy, into the small bowel. This is the tube which you will be fed through while you cannot eat or drink. Patients who undergo a gastrectomy will not have a Jej tube inserted as they are likely to get back to eating and drinking more quickly.
Laparoscopy	Procedure using a flexible tube of optic fibres to look inside the body and collect sample tissues
Lymph Glands (Lymph nodes)	Glands, which fight infection and filter body fluid found particularly in the armpits, neck and groins
Metastis, Metastasis, Metastatic	The spread of cancer cells from one part of the body to another through the bloodstream or lymphatic system. Cells that have metastasised are like those in the original tumour
MRI	Magnetic Resonance Imaging. Scan using magnetism to build up a picture of the organs inside the body
NMR	N uclear M agnetic R esonance
Nausea	Feeling sick
Nutrition	A healthy diet and the correct intake of vitamins and minerals. This can be difficult to achieve for some people with cancer and they may need advice from health professionals/dietitians
Nutritional supplements	Specially formulated drinks, powders and foods to increase calorie intake and help weight gain
Oesophagus	The tube that runs from the mouth to the stomach
Oncologist	Specialist doctor treating cancer. A consultant clinical oncologist usually treats patients with radiotherapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy. A consultant medical oncologist normally specialises in chemotherapy and hormone therapy
Oncology	Study and practice of treating cancers. Can be divided into medical, surgical and radiation oncology
Palliative care	Palliative care is designed to manage symptoms rather than cure. It can be used at any stage of the illness if there are symptoms such as pain or sickness. Palliative care may help someone to live longer and to live comfortably, even if they cannot be cured
Pathology	The study of diseased tissues
PET SCAN	Positron Emission Tomography. A scanner which uses a radioactive drug (tracer) which shows how the body tissues are working as well as what they look like



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Physiotherapist	A person who has specialised in exercises required to help patients to regain fitness following surgery
PICC Line	P ercutaneous I ntravenous C entral C atheter – a long intravenous line going into your arm, to give antibiotics or chemotherapy
Primary Cancer/Tumour	Site where the cancer started. The type of cell that has become cancerous will be the primary cancer. For example, if a biopsy from a liver, lung or breast contains cancerous cells, then the primary cancer is where these cells originate
Prognosis	The predicted or likely outcome of what might happen in a specific case of cancer
PylorusPyloric Sphincter	The sphincter is at the bottom of your stomach (pylorus). This sometimes needs to be stretched after an oesophagectomy
Radiotherapy	Cancer treatment using high-energy rays. It can take the form of 'external beam radiation' which is aimed to destroy the tumour and surrounding tissue of 'conformal' radiotherapy, which is a more targeted approach to minimise radiation to the surrounding area of 'intraluminal radiation' which places a radioactive source close to the cancer. 'Rad' stands for radiation absorbed dose. Gy (Gray) is a measurement unit of absorbed radiation.
Radiographer	Person qualified to operate radiotherapy machines and take X-rays. Radiographers specialise in either diagnostic or therapeutic functions
Radiologist	A doctor who specialises in reading X-rays and scans and carries out scans and other X-ray techniques
Squamous	Consisting of a single layer of plate-like cells. A covering resembling scales
Squamous Cell, Carcinoma (SCC)	Squamous cell carcinoma usually occurs higher up in the gullet
Staging	The extent of a cancer in the body. Staging is usually based on the size of the tumour, whether lymph nodes contain cancer, and whether the cancer has spread from the original site to other parts of the body. Each cancer type has its own staging, often from 0 to 4 or A to D
Surgeons	They perform operations and other surgical procedures (including biopsies) to diagnose and treat cancer. There are many different types of surgeon and they have different areas of interest or expertise. They may specialise in a type of cancer such as oesophageal or gastric cancer, or in operating on a particular part of the body. Sometimes several surgeons work together
Thoracotomy	An operation to open the chest



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Tumour	A growth or enlargement that causes a swelling. It is also called a neoplasm. A tumour can be localised or spreading, harmless or cancerous. It is named after its location, or its cellular make-up or for the person who identified it
Tylosis	A very rare skin disorder which is associated with oesophageal cancer
Upper gastrointestinal	The upper part of the digestive system, including the oesophagus, stomach, liver, pancreas, gall bladder and bile ducts. Often shortened to Upper GI
Ultrasound	Scan using sound waves to build up a picture of the inside of the body. The resulting picture of body tissues is called a sonogram