

Did you know that cancer is not just one disease?

Indeed, as there are over 200 different types of cancer that can affect individuals. Each type of cancer can cause various symptoms and requires different treatment approaches. To illustrate, when experiencing chest pain, the underlying reasons could be a heart attack, a lung infection, indigestion, or a broken rib cage. These are all distinct medical conditions that require different treatments. Similarly, how two different chest pains are not indicative of the same medical problem, likewise two different types of cancers are unique and require different treatments. Therefore, it's crucial not to accept everything you hear from other people with cancer since each person's situation is different.

Let's get a simple view about cancer

Cells are the building blocks of our body. They grow and divide to create new cells, ensuring the body functions properly. However, when genetic changes, which are mistakes or changes in the DNA (like a set of instructions inside our cells), interfere, cells may stop following the normal rules of growth and division. This interference can trigger uncontrollable growth of damaged cells, leading to the development of cancer and the formation of a tumor. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can grow and spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor can grow but will not spread. Cancer can develop anywhere in the body and is named for the part of the body where it started. For example, breast cancer that starts in the breast is still called breast cancer even if it spreads to other parts of the body.

Let's understand some important aspects of cancer

There are two main categories of cancer:

Hematologic (blood) cancers – cancers of the blood cells. For example : leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple melanoma.

Solid tumor cancers – cancers of any of the other body organs or tissues. For example : breast, prostate, lung, and colorectal cancers.

These cancers are alike in some ways, but can be different in the ways they grow, spread, and respond to treatment.

When a cancer is found, tests are done to see how big the cancer is and whether it has spread from where it started. This is called the cancer's stage.

A lower stage (such as a stage 1 or 2) means that the cancer has not spread very much.

A higher number (such as a stage 3 or 4) means it has spread more.

The stage of the cancer is very important in choosing the best treatment for a person. Ask your doctor about your cancer's stage and what it means for you.

Cancer can happen with various symptoms, and the specific signs depend on the type and stage of the cancer. Following are some of the common (early) symptoms of cancer :-

Significant and unintentional weight loss.

Persistent fatigue (Fatigue is a term used to describe a state of extreme tiredness or exhaustion, both physically and mentally that doesn't improve with rest).

Fever that occurs mostly at night.

Changes in the colour, size, shape, or thickness of moles or the appearance of new skin abnormalities can be indicative of cancer.

Bruising or bleeding more easily.

Lumps or bumps under your skin that don't go away.

It's important to note that many of these symptoms can also be caused by non-cancerous conditions. Therefore if you experience persistent or unusual symptoms, it's advisable to consult with a healthcare professional for a thorough evaluation. The listed symptoms above are not the only symptoms for cancer. There are more specific symptoms for specific types of cancer.

Following are some general risk factors in cancer :

A personal or family history of cancer

Carrying too much weight, known as being overweight or obese

Some types of viral infections, such as human papillomavirus (HPV) and the hepatitis virus

Exposure to radiation, including ultraviolet radiation from the sun

Having risk factors doesn't guarantee you'll get cancer. Some people with many risk factors never get it, while others with no known risks do. It's crucial to know your risk factors and discuss them with your healthcare team. This information helps you make choices for better health. Some risks can be reduced or moderated, but others, like aging, can't be avoided. How much, how often, and when you're exposed to these factors matter. For example, gaining weight after menopause increases breast cancer risk. The listed risk factors above are not the only risks for cancer. There are more specific risk factors for specific types of cancer.

