



# Diagnosing Cancer

## Screening

Your doctor may run tests even when you do not have symptoms of cancer. These are called *screening* tests. Screening is helpful because it is easier to treat cancer when it is caught early. In some cases, cancer can even be cured if found at an early stage.

Remember to talk with your care team about the risks involved with some screening tests. There is no guarantee that cancer found during screening will be curable.

If you have symptoms, your doctor will run *diagnostic* tests. These tests will tell whether or not you have cancer. They will also tell what kind of cancer you have so you and your care team can start a treatment plan.

## The 3 main types of tests that can find cancer:

- *Imaging*. Includes CT scans, nuclear scans, ultrasound, MRI, PET scans, and X-rays. These tests give pictures of your body's tissues and organs. They can help your doctor find and study tumors
- *Biopsies*. A biopsy takes samples of cells, tissues, or organs from the body. It can be done surgically or by needle or endoscope (a tube with a camera)
- *Lab tests*. Doctors use microscopes and other tools in the lab to look at samples from biopsies, blood, or other fluids. Lab tests can give your care team important information to help with treatment

## What stage is it?

Cancer is progressive. This means it grows and develops over time. To keep track of cancer's progress, doctors use *staging*. Finding the stage of your cancer is very important because it will help you and your care team plan for treatment.

## Test results and cancer stages answer these questions:

- Where is the tumor located?
- What types of cancer cells are in the tumor?
- How large is the tumor?
- Has the cancer spread to nearby lymph nodes?
- How much has the cancer spread to different parts of the body?
- What is the tumor grade? Grading tells how abnormal the cancer cells look and how likely they are to grow and spread

With the answers, your doctor may give your cancer a stage using TNM (tumor, nodes, metastasis) numbers. Ask your care team for more information about TNM staging. Another way to stage cancer goes from 0 to 4:

| Stage 0   | Stage 1, 2, and 3  | Stage 4   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abnormal cells but no cancer. No spreading to other areas</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cancer is present</li> <li>• The higher the number, the larger the tumor and the greater spreading to nearby areas</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Metastatic (spread to other parts of body from the original site)</li> </ul> |