

## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



Click on a letter below to go to the words starting with that letter:

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [X](#)

## A

---

### **Abdomen (AB-doh-men)**

The area of the body that holds the pancreas, stomach, intestines, liver, gallbladder, and other body organs.

### **Adjuvant Therapy (AD-joo-vant THER-uh-pee)**

Anything that aids in removing or preventing a disease.

### **Anesthesiologist**

A doctor who specializes in delivering drugs that sedate patients and cause unconsciousness (anesthesia) during surgery.

### **Anus (AY- nus)**

The opening at the end of the rectum where solid waste (stool, bowel movement, poop) passes from the rectum to the outside of the body.

### **Autologous ((aw-TAH-luh-gus) Transplant**

A transplant where the tissue is from the patient.

## B

---

### **Benign (beh-NINE)**

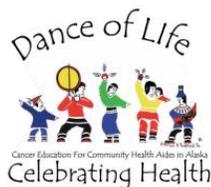
A tumor that is not cancer; it does not invade nearby tissue or spread to other parts of the body.

### **Biological Therapy**

Artificial stimulation of the body's immune system to treat or combat disease (immunotherapy).

### **Biopsy (BY-op-see)**

The removal of a sample of tissue that is examined under a microscope (by a specially trained doctor called a pathologist) to look for cancer cells.



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



---

#### **Bone Marrow/Stem Cell Transplant**

Diseased or damaged bone marrow is destroyed by high dose treatments of anticancer drugs or radiation and replaced with healthy stem cells (blood forming cells) taken from the patient before treatment or donated by another person.

[Back to Top](#)

#### **Bone Scan**

Test showing images of bones on a computer screen or on film. A small amount of a radioactive substance is injected into the bloodstream and collects in the bones.

#### **Bowel (BOW-ul)**

The long tube-shaped organ in the abdomen that completes digestion; there is both a small and large bowel, also called small and large intestine.

## C

---

#### **Cancer**

A word for more than 100 different diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control or order.

#### **Carcinogen (car-SIN-oh-gin)**

A substance or agent that is known to cause cancer.

#### **Carcinogenesis (car-SIN-oh-JEN-eh-sis)**

The process of a normal cell changing to a cancer cell.

#### **Carcinoma (car-cin-OH-ma)**

A cancer that begins in the epithelium, the body's skin and tissues that line the internal organs. Eighty to 90% of all cancers are carcinomas.

#### **Cell**

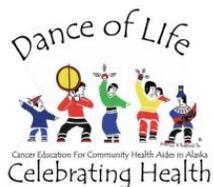
Basic building block of human tissue.

#### **Chemotherapy (kee-moh-THER-up-pee)**

Treatment with cancer fighting drugs to kill cancer cells.

#### **Chromosomes (KRO-muh-soh-mz)**

Threadlike structures within each cell that contain a double strand of DNA with chemical information for cell function and replication. Human cells have 46 chromosomes, 23 from mother and 23 from father.



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



[Back to Page 1](#)

#### **Clinical Breast Exam (CBE)**

Breast exam to discover changes in the breast tissue done by a health care provider.

#### **Colon (KO-lun)**

A five to six foot tube-like organ, also called the large intestine or large bowel, connected to the small intestine at one end and the rectum at the other end. The colon removes water and gets rid of waste, stuff your body can't use. The colon has four parts: ascending colon, transverse colon, descending colon, and sigmoid colon.

#### **Colonoscopy (KOH-lun-OSS-koh-pee)**

A procedure in which a health care provider looks inside the entire colon and rectum using a thin, flexible, lighted tube called a colonoscope, to find and remove polyps before they become cancer.

#### **Colorectal (KO-lur-EK-tal)**

A combination of the words colon and rectum to refer to those parts of the lower digestive tract; colon + rectal = colorectal.

#### **Colposcopy (Kol- POSS-koh-pee)**

A visual exam of the cervix using a colposcope to magnify cells.

#### **Computed Tomography CAT or CT Scan**

An x-ray test using a computer to make a picture of the body.

#### **Crohn's disease (kronz)**

Chronic inflammation of the lining of the digestive tract, especially the small intestine and colon.

#### **Cure**

Restoration of health; recovery from disease; free from cancer.

## D

**Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) (dee-OX-see-RY-boh-noo-clay-ick A-sid)** The substance of heredity carrying the genetic information that cells need to replicate and to produce proteins.

#### **Differentiated (DIF-uh-REN-shee-ated)**

Describes how closely abnormal tumor cells look like normal cells.



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



---

#### **Digital Rectal Exam (DRE)**

An exam done by gently inserting a gloved finger into the rectum to check for abnormalities of the rectum. The exam, in men, also checks for changes of the prostate gland.

[Back to Page 1](#)

#### **Distant**

Cancer has spread to other organs and systems of the body.

#### **DNA Repair Genes**

Special genes that fix errors that happen when a cell copies its DNA before dividing to make 2 new cells. They protect the body from cancer causing mutations (errors).

## E

---

#### **Epithelium (EP-ih-THEE-lee-um)**

Tissues that line the skin and internal organs.

## F

---

#### **Familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP)**

(Fam-EE-lee-uhl ad-in-O-mut-us Pah-li-PO-sis)

A very rare, inherited condition that causes hundreds of polyps in the colon; nearly everyone with FAP develops colorectal cancer before the age of 50.

#### **Familial Cancer**

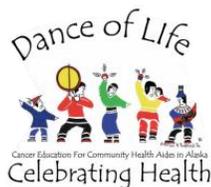
A specific type of cancer that happens in 2 or more blood relatives in the same family.

#### **Family History**

Information about diseases, disorders and illnesses in a person's blood relatives.

#### **Family Pedigree**

An outline of the medical history of a specific family.



[Back to Page 1](#)

## G

---

### **Genes (jeens)**

The basic units of heredity.

### **Genetic Counselor**

A specially trained person who talks with and educates individuals and families with cancer or who are at risk for cancer.

### **Genetics**

The study of genes and heredity.

### **Gene Testing (jeen testing)**

Examination of a person's DNA, usually from a blood sample, for a particular gene mutation.

## H

---

### **Heredity (Ha-reh-DUH-tee)**

The genetic information (genes) children inherit from their parents.

### **Hereditary Cancer (Ha-RED-ih-tair-ee CAN-sir)**

A cancer caused by a mutated gene inherited from a parent.

### **Hereditary Cancer Syndrome (Ha-RED-ih-tair-ee CAN-sir SIN-droh)**

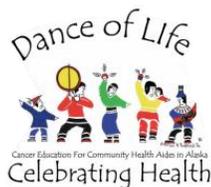
An inherited mutated gene causes more than one kind of cancer in a family.

### **Hope**

A positive outlook with desire or expectation for the best outcome.

### **Hormone Therapy**

Treatment of cancer by removing, blocking, or adding hormones.



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



[Back to Page 1](#)

#### **Immune Response**

The reaction of the body to substances that are foreign or are seen as foreign.

#### **Immune System**

The body's system that resists and fights disease. It includes the white blood cells and antibodies.

#### **Immunotherapy**

Treatment to stimulate or restore the ability of the immune system to fight infection and disease.

#### **Incidence (In-sih-dence)**

The number of people newly diagnosed each year with a disease. For example, if a population initially contains 1,000 non-diseased persons and 14 develop a condition over one year of observation, the incidence rate is 14 cases per 1,000 persons, 1.4%.

#### **Inflammatory bowel disease**

A disease that causes irritation and ulcers in the intestinal tract. Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis are the most common inflammatory bowel diseases.

#### **In-situ (in-SIT-ooH)**

Cancer cells found in the upper most layer of tissue, not invasive.

#### **Intravenous (IV) (in-truh-VEE-nus)**

Within or into a vein, for example chemotherapy given into the vein.

#### **Invasive**

Cancer cells spreading beyond the upper most layer into healthy tissue.

## L

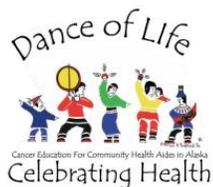
---

#### **Large intestine**

The tube-like organ, also called the colon, that extends from the small intestine at one end to the rectum at the other end. See colon.

#### **Latency (Lay-ten-see)**

An effect that does not appear for a long time.



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



[Back to Page 1](#)

#### **Laxative (LAX-uh-tive)**

A substance that causes the bowels to get rid of solid waste or poop.

#### **Leukemia (loo-KEE-mee-uh)**

A cancer of the white blood cells formed from the blood-forming tissues, mainly the bone marrow, lymph nodes and spleen.

#### **Local**

Cancer found only in the organ where the cancer first started to grow.

#### **Local Treatment**

Only affects cancer in the treated area. Surgery and radiation are local treatments.

#### **Lower GI series (Barium Enema)**

A series of x-rays, taken after a person drinks a barium solution, which shows the large intestine or colon.

#### **Lymphoma (lim-FO-ma)**

A cancer that develops in the lymphatic system, part of the body's immune defense system.

## M

---

#### **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) (mag-NEH-tik REH-zoh-nants IH-muh-jing)**

A procedure using a magnet linked to a computer to make pictures of areas inside the body.

#### **Malignant (muh-LIG-nant)**

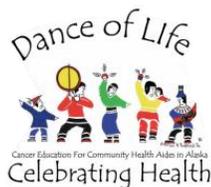
A tumor that is cancer and has the ability to spread to other parts of the body.

#### **Mammogram (MAM-oh-gram)**

A special x-ray of the breast.

#### **Mediport**

A surgically implanted device used to give medications and fluids. A mediport decreases the need to start an IV every time the medicine is given.



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



---

[Back to Page 1](#)

#### **Metastasis (meh-TAS-tuh-sis)**

The spread of cancer from one part of the body to another part of the body through the lymph system or blood system.

#### **Mortality Rate**

The number of deaths in a population from a specific disease. Mortality rate is stated in units of deaths per 1000 individuals per year; thus, a mortality rate of 9.5 in a population of 100,000 would mean 950 deaths per year in that entire population.

#### **Mutation (myoo-TAY-shun)**

A mistake or error in a gene.

#### **Myeloma (my-eh-LOW-muh)**

A cancer that starts in plasma cells made in the bone marrow.

## N

---

#### **Needle Biopsy**

Removing a tiny piece of tissue with a needle.

#### **Neurologist**

Doctor specializing in caring for the nervous system.

## O

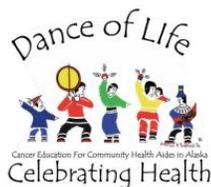
---

#### **Oncogenes (ON-koh-jeens)**

Genes that direct the normal growth of cells but, when damaged, can cause the growth of cancer.

#### **Oncologist (on-KAH-loh-jist)**

A medical doctor who specializes in the care of people with cancer.



[Back to Page 1](#)

## P

---

### **Palliative**

Treatment or end-of-life care in which the only goal is the comfort of the person.

### **Pap Smear or Pap Test**

An exam, done by a health care provider, to take a sample of cervical cells to look for changes that may be precancer or cancer.

### **Pathologist (puh-THAH-loh-jist)**

A medical doctor who diagnoses diseases by studying cells and tissues under a microscope.

### **Polyp (POL-ip)**

An abnormal growth inside the colon or rectum. These growths can sometimes turn into cancer if they are not removed.

### **Prevention (pree-VEN-shun)**

Eliminate or decrease disease. Health promotion and education to support wellness.

### **Primary Site or Primary Tumor Site**

The location in the body where the cancer first starts to grow.

### **Prognosis (prog-NO-sis)**

The probable outcome or course of a disease; the chance of recovery.

## R

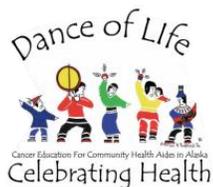
---

### **Radiation Oncologist**

A medical doctor who specializes in using radiation to treat cancer.

### **Radiation Therapy**

Treatment with high-energy rays to kill or damage cancer cells. External radiation therapy is the use of a machine to aim high-energy rays at the cancer. Internal radiation therapy is the placement of radioactive material inside the body as close as possible to the cancer.



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



[Back to Page 1](#)

#### **Rectum (REK-tum)**

The lowest end of the digestive tract located between the sigmoid colon and the anus; solid waste (stool, poop) is stored here before it is passed out of the body through the anus.

#### **Regional**

Cancer has spread to the surrounding tissues or lymph nodes.

#### **Remission (ree-MISH-un)**

Disappearance of the signs and symptoms of cancer. Remission can be temporary or permanent.

#### **Risk Factor**

Something in an individual, in her or his lifestyle, or environment, which increases the chance of developing cancer.

## S

#### **Sarcoma (sar-KOH-muh)**

A cancer that starts to grow in bone, fat, muscle, nerve, joint, blood vessel, or deep skin tissues.

#### **Screening**

Checking for disease when there are no symptoms.

#### **Secondhand smoke** (also called passive or environmental tobacco smoke)

This is a mixture of the smoke given off by the burning end of tobacco products and the smoke exhaled by smokers. It contains the same cancer-causing agents or carcinogens as the smoke inhaled by smokers.

#### **Sigmoidoscopy (sig-moy-DOS-koh-pee)**

A procedure in which a health care provider looks inside the rectum and lower one third of the colon, called the descending or sigmoid colon, using a thin, flexible, lighted tube called a sigmoidoscope.

#### **Small intestine**

The part of the digestive tract between the stomach and the large intestine, approximately 20 feet in length. Food is partly digested here by juices from the pancreas, liver, and intestine.

#### **Sonogram (SAW-nuh-gram)**

Picture from an ultrasound.



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



[Back to Page 1](#)

#### **Sporadic Cancer (spuh-RAD-ik Can-sir)**

A cancer that happens once in awhile by chance. Most cancers are sporadic.

#### **Stage**

Describes how far the cancer has spread from the original site to other parts of the body (i.e., in-situ, local, regional, distant).

#### **Stereotactic Breast Biopsy (stair-ee-oh-TAK-tik breast by-OP-see)**

A small piece of breast tissue is taken with a needle using x-rays to locate the suspicious area.

#### **Stomach**

A muscular, pouch-like organ that helps food digest by mixing it with digestive juices and turning it into a thin liquid. The stomach stores food you have eaten, breaks it down into a liquid mixture, and slowly empties that liquid into the small intestine.

#### **Stomatitis (STOH-muh-TY-tis)**

Inflammation of the mouth, or mouth sores.

#### **Surgeon (SIR-jin)**

A medical doctor who does operations.

#### **Surgery (SIR-jih-ree)**

An operation.

#### **Survival Rate**

The number of people in a population with a disease that survive that disease; it may be given a time frame, e.g. the 5 year survival rate of breast cancer is the number of people with breast cancer who are still living 5 years after the diagnosis of cancer. Doctors use survival rates to estimate the patient's prognosis over time, for example: one, five, and ten years.

#### **Systemic Treatment**

The delivery of medicine throughout the entire body. Chemotherapy is a systemic treatment.



[Back to Page 1](#)

## T

### **Targeted Therapy**

Stops the growth and spread of cancer by blocking the process of normal cells becoming cancer cells.

### **Testicular Exam (tes-TIK-u-ler EX-am)**

An exam done to feel for lumps in the testes to help find testicular cancer early.

### **Tissue**

Group or layer of cells that is alike and work together to perform body functions. Tissue makes up the organs of the body.

### **Tumor (TOO-mer)**

An abnormal growth of cells or tissues; tumors may be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).

### **Tumor Board Review**

A treatment planning approach in which a number of doctors who are experts in different specialties review and discuss the medical condition and treatment options of a patient. In cancer treatment, a tumor board review may include that of a medical oncologist (who provides cancer treatment with drugs), a surgical oncologist (who provides cancer treatment with surgery), and a radiation oncologist (who provides cancer treatment with radiation).

### **Tumor Grade**

Describes how fast a cancer tumor is growing and how closely the abnormal cells look like normal cells.

### **Tumor Suppressor Genes**

Genes that normally restrain cell growth but, when missing or inactivated due to damage, allow cells to grow uncontrolled.

## U

### **Ulcerative colitis (UL-sur-ay-tuv KO-LY-tis)**

A chronic inflammation of the colon that may cause ulcers in the lining of the colon. Symptoms may include: abdominal pain, cramps, frequent diarrhea with pus, blood or mucus.

### **Ultrasound (UHL-truh-sound)**



## Understanding Cancer Glossary

### Cancer Education Course



---

An exam in which sound waves are bounced off tissues and the echoes are converted into a picture called a sonogram.

#### **Upper GI Series (Barium Swallow)**

A series of x-rays, taken after a person drinks a barium solution, which shows the upper digestive organs.

## X

#### **X-rays**

High energy radiation used in low doses to diagnose disease or injury. Also used in high doses to treat cancer (radiation therapy).

[Back to Page 1](#)