

GENERAL TERMS

Sources:

cancer.gov (U.S. government site), unless indicated otherwise. Key is:
(1) *Childhood Cancer: A Parent's Guide to Solid Tumor Cancers* by Honna Janes-Hodder & Nancy Keene, copyright 1999, O'Reilly & Associates, Inc.

abnormal

Not normal. Describes a state, condition, or behavior that is unusual or different from what is considered normal. An abnormal lesion or growth in or on the body may be benign (not cancer), precancerous or premalignant (likely to become cancer), or malignant (cancer).

absolute neutrophil count (... NOO-troh-fil ...) Also called ANC.

A measure of the number of neutrophils in the blood. Neutrophils are a type of white blood cell. They help the body fight infection. An absolute neutrophil count may be used to check for infection, inflammation, leukemia, and other conditions. The lower a person's absolute neutrophil count is, the higher the risk is of getting an infection. Having an absolute neutrophil count of less than 500 means there is a high risk of getting an infection. Cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy, may reduce the absolute neutrophil count.

activities of daily living Also called ADL.

The tasks of everyday life. These activities include eating, dressing, getting into or out of a bed or chair, taking a bath or shower, and using the toilet. Instrumental activities of daily living are activities related to independent living and include preparing meals, managing money, shopping, doing housework, and using a telephone.

acute

Occurring over a short period of time. (1)

adenopathy (A-deh-NAH-puh-thee)

Large or swollen lymph glands.

ADL SEE activities of daily living, above.

adolescents and young adults Also called AYA.

In cancer treatment, adolescents and young adults are people between age 15 and 39. [No source.]

advance directive

A legal document that states the treatment or care a person wishes to receive or not receive if he or she becomes unable to make medical decisions (for example, due to being unconscious or in a coma). Some types of advance directives are living wills and do-not-resuscitate (DNR) orders.

alternative medicine SEE complementary and alternative medicine, below.

ambulatory

Able to walk. (1)

anaphylaxis

An acute allergic reaction which can be life-threatening. (1)

analgesic

A drug used to relieve pain. (1)

ANC SEE absolute neutrophil count, above.

anemia

Condition in which there is a reduction in the number of circulating red blood cells. (1)

anorexia

Loss of appetite. (1)

antibody

A protein that works to defend the body against bacterial and viral infections. (1)

antigen

A foreign substance that stimulates the lymphocytes to produce antibodies. (1)

ascites

An abnormal collection of fluid in the abdomen. (1)

asepsis or aseptic

Free of infection. (1)

ataxia

Loss of balance. (1)

attending physician

Doctor on the staff of a hospital who has completed medical school, residency, and fellowship. (1)

asymptomatic

Without symptoms. (1)

atypical

Not usual or ordinary. (1)

axillary (AK-sih-LAYR-ee)

Pertaining to the armpit area, including the lymph nodes that are located there.

AYA SEE adolescents and young adults, above.

benign

Noncancerous. (1)

best practice Also called standard medical care, standard of care, and standard therapy.

Treatment that is accepted by medical experts as a proper treatment for a certain type of disease and that is widely used by healthcare professionals.

bilirubin

A pigment that is produced by the liver as it processes wastes. When elevated, bilirubin causes yellowing of the skin. (1)

biopsy

Removal of a small sample of tissue for examination under a microscope. (1)

blood-brain barrier

A network of blood vessels located around the central nervous system with very closely spaced cells that make it difficult for potentially toxic substances — including anticancer drugs — to enter the brain and spinal cord. (1)

blood cell count Also called CBC, complete blood count, and full blood count.

A measure of the number of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets in the blood. The amount of hemoglobin (substance in the blood that carries oxygen) and the hematocrit (the amount of whole blood that is made up of red blood cells) are also measured. A blood cell count is used to help diagnose and monitor many conditions.

blood cell count with differential Also called CBC with differential.

A measure of the number of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets in the blood, including the different types of white blood cells (neutrophils, lymphocytes, monocytes, basophils, and eosinophils). The amount of hemoglobin (substance in the blood that carries oxygen) and the hematocrit (the amount of whole blood that is made up of red blood cells) are also measured. A blood cell count with differential is used to help diagnose and monitor many different conditions, including anemia and infection.

blood type

Identification of the proteins in a person's blood cells so that transfusions can be given with compatible blood products. Possible blood types are A+, A-, B+, B-, AB+, AB-, O+, and O-. (1)

bone marrow

The soft, sponge-like tissue in the center of most bones. It produces white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets.

cachexia

The wasting away of the body; extreme weight loss, usually caused by disease or malnutrition. (1)

CAM SEE complementary and alternative medicine, below.

cancer Also called malignancy.

A term for diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control and can invade nearby tissues. Cancer cells can also spread to other parts of the body through the blood and lymph systems. There are several main types of cancer. Carcinoma is a cancer that begins in the skin or in tissues that line or cover internal organs. Sarcoma is a cancer that begins in bone, cartilage, fat, muscle, blood vessels, or other connective or supportive tissue. Leukemia is a cancer that starts in blood-forming tissue, such as the bone marrow, and causes large numbers of abnormal blood cells to be produced and enter the blood. Lymphoma and multiple myeloma are cancers that begin in the cells of the immune system. Central nervous system cancers are cancers that begin in the tissues of the brain and spinal cord.

cancer of unknown primary origin Also called carcinoma of unknown primary origin and CUP.

A case in which cancer cells are found in the body, but the place where the cells first started growing (the origin or primary site) cannot be determined.

cancer subtype

Describes the smaller groups that a type of cancer can be divided into, based on certain characteristics of the cancer cells. These characteristics include how the cancer cells look under a microscope and whether there are certain substances in or on the cells or certain changes to the DNA of the cells. It is important to know the subtype of a cancer in order to plan treatment and determine prognosis.

carcinogen

A substance or agent that produces cancer. (1)

carcinoma of unknown primary origin SEE cancer of unknown primary origin, above.

cardiac

Pertaining to the heart. (1)

catheter

A tube that can be placed into the body to deliver fluids or medications, or to drain fluid. (1)

cause-specific survival Also called CSS.

The length of time from either the date of diagnosis or the start of treatment for a disease, such as cancer, to the date of death from the disease. Patients who die from causes unrelated to the disease are not counted in this measurement. In a clinical trial, measuring the cause-specific survival is one way to see how well a new treatment works.

CBC SEE blood cell count, above.

CBC with differential SEE blood cell count with differential, above.

centigray (cg)

Measurement of radiation-absorbed dose; same as a rad. (1)

childhood cancer

A term used to describe cancers that occur between birth and 15 years of age. Childhood cancers are very rare and may differ from adult cancers in the way they grow and spread, how they are treated, and how they respond to treatment. Common types of childhood cancer include leukemia (begins in blood-forming tissue such as bone marrow), lymphoma (begins in the cells of the immune system), neuroblastoma (begins in certain nerve cells), retinoblastoma (begins in the tissues of the retina), Wilms tumor (a type of kidney cancer), and cancers of the brain, bone, and soft tissue.

childhood cancer risk group

A group of children with cancer that has been formed based on certain characteristics of the children and their disease. These may include age at diagnosis, stage of cancer, and cancer biology. Risk groups may also be

based on the chance of being cured or the chance that the cancer will come back. Childhood cancer risk groups are used to plan treatment and follow-up care for certain types of cancer, such as neuroblastoma and rhabdomyosarcoma. Risk groups may be described as low risk, intermediate risk, or high risk.

chromosome

A structure in the nucleus of a cell that contains genetic material. Normally, 46 chromosomes are inside each human cell. (1)

complementary and alternative medicine Also called CAM.

Forms of treatment that are used in addition to (complementary) or instead of (alternative) standard treatments. These practices generally are not considered standard medical approaches. Standard treatments go through a long and careful research process to prove they are safe and effective, but less is known about most types of complementary and alternative medicine. Complementary and alternative medicine may include dietary supplements, megadose vitamins, herbal preparations, special teas, acupuncture, massage therapy, magnet therapy, spiritual healing, and meditation.

complete blood count SEE blood cell count, above.

connective tissue

Supporting tissue that surrounds other tissues and organs. Specialized connective tissue includes bone, cartilage, blood, and fat.

consent process Also called informed consent.

A process in which patients are given important information, including possible risks and benefits, about a medical procedure or treatment, a clinical trial, or genetic testing. This is to help them decide if they want to be treated, tested, or take part in the trial. Patients are also given any new information that might affect their decision to continue.

CSS SEE cause-specific survival, above.

cumulative dose

In medicine, the total amount of a drug or radiation given to a patient over time; for example, the total dose of radiation given in a series of radiation treatments.

cumulative exposure

The total amount of a substance or radiation that a person is exposed to over time. Cumulative exposure to a harmful substance or radiation may increase the risk of certain diseases or conditions.

CUP SEE cancer of unknown primary origin, above.

cytotoxic

Causing the death of cells. (1)

de novo

In cancer, the first occurrence of cancer in the body.

deferred therapy SEE watchful waiting, below.

definitive diagnosis

A final diagnosis that is made after getting the results of tests, such as blood tests and biopsies, that are done to find out if a certain disease or condition is present.

definitive treatment

The treatment plan for a disease or disorder that has been chosen as the best one for a patient after all other choices have been considered.

distant cancer or distant metastasis

Refers to cancer that has spread from the original (primary) tumor to distant organs or distant lymph nodes.

edema

The abnormal collection of fluid within tissues. (1)

eligibility criteria

In clinical trials, requirements that must be met for an individual to be included in a study. These requirements help make sure that patients in a trial are similar to each other in terms of specific factors such as age, type and stage of cancer, general health, and previous treatment. When all participants meet the same eligibility criteria, it gives researchers greater confidence that results of the study are caused by the intervention being tested and not by other factors.

emesis

Vomiting. (1)

erythrocytes

Red blood cells. (1)

excision

Surgery to remove tissue. (1)

extraosseous

Occurring outside of the bone. (1)

febrile

A fever. (1)

fine needle aspiration (FNA)

Removing small samples of tissue, usually while under a local anesthetic, through a fine needle. (1)

finger poke

When a laboratory technician pricks the finger tip to obtain a small sample of blood. (1)

full blood count SEE blood cell count, above.

good clinical practice Also called GCP.

An international set of guidelines that helps make sure that the results of a clinical trial are reliable and that the patients are protected. GCP covers the way a clinical trial is designed, conducted, performed, monitored, audited, recorded, analyzed, and reported.

grading SEE also high grade, intermediate grade, and low grade, below.

A system for classifying cancer cells in terms of how abnormal they appear when examined under a microscope. The objective of a grading system is to provide information about the probable growth rate of the tumor and its tendency to spread. The systems used to grade tumors vary with each type of cancer. Grading plays a role in treatment decisions.

health care proxy Also called HCP.

A type of advance directive that gives a person (such as a relative, lawyer, or friend) the authority to make healthcare decisions for another person. It becomes active when that person loses the ability to make decisions for himself or herself.

high grade

A term used to describe cells and tissue that look abnormal under a microscope. High-grade cancer cells tend to grow and spread more quickly than low-grade cancer cells. Cancer grade may be used to help plan treatment and determine prognosis. High-grade cancers usually have a worse prognosis than low-grade cancers and may need treatment right away or treatment that is more aggressive (intensive).

informed consent SEE consent process, above.

intermediate grade

A term used to describe how abnormal cancer cells look under a microscope. Intermediate-grade cancer cells look more abnormal than low-grade cancer cells but not as abnormal as high-grade cancer cells. They also tend to grow and spread more quickly than low-grade cancer cells but not as quickly as high-grade cancer cells. Cancer cell grade, along with cancer type and stage, may be used to help plan treatment and determine prognosis.

invasive cancer

Cancer that has spread beyond the layer of tissue in which it developed and is growing into surrounding, healthy tissues. Also called infiltrating cancer.

late effect

A health problem that occurs months or years after a disease is diagnosed or after treatment has ended. Late effects may be caused by cancer or cancer treatment. They may include physical, mental, and social problems and second cancers.

late-stage cancer

A term used to describe cancer that is far along in its growth, and has spread to the lymph nodes or other places in the body.

lesion

An area of abnormal tissue. A lesion may be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).

living will

A type of legal advance directive in which a person describes specific treatment guidelines that are to be followed by health care providers if he or she becomes terminally ill and cannot communicate. A living will usually has instructions about whether to use aggressive medical treatment to keep a person alive (such as CPR, artificial nutrition, use of a respirator).

local cancer

An invasive malignant cancer confined entirely to the organ where the cancer began.

locally advanced cancer

Cancer that has spread from where it started to nearby tissue or lymph nodes.

locally recurrent cancer

Cancer that has recurred (come back) at or near the same place as the original (primary) tumor, usually after a period of time during which the cancer could not be detected.

low grade

A term used to describe cells and tissue that look almost normal under a microscope. Low-grade cancer cells look more like normal cells and tend to grow and spread more slowly than high-grade cancer cells. Cancer grade may be used to help plan treatment and determine prognosis. Low-grade cancers usually have a better prognosis than high-grade cancers and may not need treatment right away.

lymph node Also called lymph gland.

A rounded mass of lymphatic tissue that is surrounded by a capsule of connective tissue. Lymph nodes filter lymph (lymphatic fluid), and they store lymphocytes (white blood cells). They are located along lymphatic vessels.

malignancy (muh-LIG-nun-see) SEE cancer, above.

mass

In medicine, a lump in the body. It may be caused by the abnormal growth of cells, a cyst, hormonal changes, or an immune reaction. A mass may be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer).

mast cell

A type of white blood cell.

mean survival

The average length of time from either the date of diagnosis or the start of treatment for a disease, such as cancer, that patients diagnosed with the disease are still alive. In a clinical trial, measuring mean survival is one way to see how well a new treatment works.

measurable disease

A tumor that can be accurately measured in size. This information can be used to judge response to treatment.

metastasis (meh-TAS-tuh-sis)

The spread of cancer from one part of the body to another. A tumor formed by cells that have spread is called a “metastatic tumor” or a “metastasis.” The metastatic tumor contains cells that are like those in the original (primary) tumor. The plural form of metastasis is metastases (meh-TAS-tuh-SEEZ).

micrometastasis (MY-kroh-meh-TAS-tuh-sis)

Small numbers of cancer cells that have spread from the primary tumor to other parts of the body and are too few to be picked up in a screening or diagnostic test.

mitotic rate Also called MR.

A measure of how fast cancer cells are dividing and growing. To find the MR, the number of cells dividing in a certain amount of cancer tissue is counted. MR is used to help find the stage of melanoma (a type of skin cancer) and other types of cancer. Higher MRs are linked with lower survival rates.

MR SEE mitotic rate, above.

NED SEE no evidence of disease, below.

negative test result

A test result that shows that a person does not have the disease, condition, or biomarker for which the test is being done. A negative test result usually means that the test result is normal, but it does not mean that a person will never get the disease or condition. More testing may be needed to make sure a negative test result is correct.

no evidence of disease Also called NED, or no evidence of recurrent disease or NERD.

A situation where all signs and symptoms of cancer have disappeared, although cancer may still be in the body. Generally used with respect to cancers with solid tumor. [No source.]

no evidence of recurrent disease SEE no evidence of disease, above.

NERD SEE no evidence of disease, above.

nonmetastatic (non-meh-tuh-STA-tik)

Cancer that has not spread from the primary site (place where it started) to other places in the body.

objective improvement

An improvement that can be measured by the health care provider (for example, when a tumor shrinks or there are fewer cancer cells in the blood).

objective response

A measurable response.

off-label

Describes the legal use of a prescription drug to treat a disease or condition for which the drug has not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

OS SEE overall survival, below.

overall survival Also called OS.

The length of time from either the date of diagnosis or the start of treatment for a disease, such as cancer, that patients diagnosed with the disease are still alive. In a clinical trial, measuring the OS is one way to see how well a new treatment works.

pathology report (puh-THAH-loh-jee ...)

The description of cells and tissues made by a pathologist based on microscopic evidence, and sometimes used to make a diagnosis of a disease.

patient advocate

A person who helps a patient work with others who have an effect on the patient's health, including doctors, insurance companies, employers, case managers, and lawyers. A patient advocate helps resolve issues about health care, medical bills, and job discrimination related to a patient's medical condition. Cancer advocacy groups try to raise public awareness about important cancer issues, such as the need for cancer support services, education, and research. Such groups work to bring about change that will help cancer patients and their families.

PDQ Also called Physician Data Query.

PDQ is an online database developed and maintained by the National Cancer Institute. Designed to make the most current, credible, and accurate cancer information available to health professionals and the public, PDQ contains peer-reviewed summaries on cancer treatment, screening, prevention, genetics, complementary and alternative medicine, and supportive care; a registry of cancer clinical trials from around the world; and directories of physicians, professionals who provide genetics services, and organizations that provide cancer care. Most of this information, and more specific information about PDQ, can be found on the NCI's Web site at <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq>.

peripherally inserted central catheter SEE PICC, below.

Physician Data Query SEE PDQ, above.

PICC Also called **peripherally inserted central catheter**.

A thin, flexible tube that is inserted into a vein in the upper arm and guided (threaded) into a large vein near the heart called the vena cava. It is used to give intravenous fluids, blood transfusions, and chemotherapy and other drugs, and for taking blood samples. It avoids the need for repeated needle sticks. It is a type of central venous access device.

port Also called **port-a-cath**.

An implanted device through which blood may be withdrawn and drugs may be infused without repeated needle sticks.

post-traumatic stress disorder SEE PTSD, below.

power of attorney

A power of attorney is a legal document that gives one person (such as a relative, lawyer, or friend) the authority to make legal, medical, or financial decisions for another person. It may go into effect right away, or when that person is no longer able to make decisions for himself or herself.

primary cancer Also called **primary tumor**.

A term used to describe the original, or first, tumor in the body. Cancer cells from a primary cancer may spread to other parts of the body and form new, or secondary, tumors. This is called metastasis. These secondary tumors are the same type of cancer as the primary cancer.

primary tumor SEE primary cancer, above.

protocol

A detailed plan of a scientific or medical experiment, treatment, or procedure. In clinical trials, it states what the study will do, how it will be done, and why it is being done. It explains how many people will be in the study, who is eligible to take part in it, what study drugs or other interventions will be given, what tests will be done and how often, and what information will be collected.

PTSD Also called **post-traumatic stress disorder**.

An anxiety disorder that develops in reaction to physical injury or severe mental or emotional distress, such as military combat, violent assault, natural disaster, or other life-threatening events. Having cancer may also lead to PTSD. Symptoms interfere with day-to-day living and include reliving the event in nightmares or flashbacks; avoiding people, places, and things connected to the event; feeling alone and losing interest in daily activities; and having trouble concentrating and sleeping.

QA SEE quality assurance, below.

quality assurance Also called QA.

A process that looks at activities or products on a regular basis to make sure they are being done at the required level of excellence. In clinical trials, QA makes sure that all parts of the trial follow the law and the Good Clinical Practice guidelines.

quality of life

The overall enjoyment of life. Many clinical trials assess the effects of cancer and its treatment on the quality of life. These studies measure aspects of an individual's sense of well-being and ability to carry out various activities.

recurrence Also called a Recurrent cancer.

Cancer that has recurred (come back), usually after a period of time during which the cancer could not be detected. The cancer may come back to the same place as the original (primary) tumor or to another place in the body.

remission

A decrease in or disappearance of signs and symptoms of cancer. In partial remission, some, but not all, signs and symptoms of cancer have disappeared. In complete remission, all signs and symptoms of cancer have disappeared, although cancer still may be in the body.

scan

A type of test that makes detailed pictures of areas inside the body. A scan may also refer to the picture that gets made during the test. Scans may be used to help diagnose disease, plan treatment, or find out how well treatment is working. There are many different types of scans, including computed tomography (CT) scans, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, and nuclear medicine scans (such as bone scans and liver scans). CT scans are done with an x-ray machine linked to a computer. MRI scans are done with radio waves and a powerful magnet linked to a computer. Nuclear medicine scans are done with small amounts of radioactive substances that are injected into the body and a special machine that detects the radioactive substance.

second primary cancer

Refers to a new primary cancer in a person with a history of cancer.

second-line therapy

Treatment that is given when initial treatment (first-line therapy) doesn't work, or stops working.

second-look surgery

Surgery performed after primary treatment to determine whether tumor cells remain.

secondary cancer Also called secondary tumor.

A term that is used to describe cancer that has spread to another part of the body from the place in which it started. Secondary cancers are the same type of cancer as the original (primary) cancer.

secondary tumor SEE secondary cancer, above.

sepsis (SEP-sis)

The presence of bacteria or their toxins in the blood or tissues.

short-term side effect

A problem that is caused by treatment of a disease but usually goes away after treatment ends. Short-term side effects of cancer treatment include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, hair loss, fatigue, and mouth sores.

solid tumor

An abnormal mass of tissue that usually does not contain cysts or liquid areas. Solid tumors may be benign (not cancer), or malignant (cancer). Different types of solid tumors are named for the type of cells that form them. Examples of solid tumors are sarcomas, carcinomas, and lymphomas. Leukemias (cancers of the blood) generally do not form solid tumors.

stable disease

Cancer that is neither decreasing nor increasing in extent or severity.

stage

The extent of a cancer in the body. Staging is usually based on the size of the tumor, whether lymph nodes contain cancer, and whether the cancer has spread from the original site to other parts of the body. Stage generally ranges from Stage 1 (usually small and localized) to Stage 4 (metastatic).

Standard medical care, Standard of care, or Standard therapy. SEE best practice, above.

subcutaneous port (SUB-kyoo-TAY-nee-us ...)

A tube surgically placed into a blood vessel and attached to a disk placed under the skin. It is used for the administration of intravenous fluids and drugs; it can also be used to obtain blood samples.

synovial membrane (sih-NOH-vee-ul ...)

A layer of connective tissue that lines the cavities of joints, tendon sheaths, and bursae (fluid-filled sacs between tendons and bones). The synovial membrane makes synovial fluid, which has a lubricating function.

T cell Also called T lymphocyte and thymocyte.

A type of white blood cell. T cells are part of the immune system and develop from stem cells in the bone marrow. They help protect the body from infection and may help fight cancer.

T lymphocyte SEE T cell, above.

Thymocyte SEE T cell, above.

tumor burden Also called tumor load.

Refers to the number of cancer cells, the size of a tumor, or the amount of cancer in the body. Also called tumor load.

tumor load SEE tumor burden, above.

unresectable

Unable to be removed with surgery.

watchful waiting Also called deferred therapy.

Closely watching a patient's condition but not giving treatment unless symptoms appear or change. Watchful waiting is sometimes used in conditions that progress slowly. It is also used when the risks of treatment are greater than the possible benefits. During watchful waiting, patients may be given certain tests and exams. Watchful waiting is sometimes used in prostate cancer. It is a type of expectant management.