

Dictionary of Terms Related to Cancer

*This dictionary will be added to regularly; any terms not bolded will be defined soon.
If you have a term you do not understand, please send it to us for research and addition.*

Adenocarcinoma. A malignant tumor formed from glandular structures in epithelial tissue.

Alimentary canal. See gastrointestinal tube.

Alimentary tube. See Gastrointestinal tract.

Basal cells. Cells are in the lower part of the epidermis, called the basal cell layer; these constantly divide to form new cells to replace the squamous cells that wear off the skin's surface.

Benign. Not harmful.

Biopsy. An examination of tissue removed from a living body to discover the presence, cause, or extent of a disease.

Bisphosphonates. A group of drugs that slow bone loss. Administered by soluble powder or IV.

Carcinoma. A cancer arising in the epithelial tissue of the skin or of the lining of the internal organs.

Carcinoma *in situ*. A malignant tumor that is localized, i.e. has not spread from its original site.

Cartilage. Tough but flexible tissue that is the main type of connective tissue in the body. Around 65–80% of cartilage is water (decreases in older people); the rest is a gel-like substance responsible for form and function.

Cell differentiation. Cellular differentiation is responsible for one daughter cell becoming a sieve tube while the other becomes a companion cell; cell differentiation occurs as different genes are switched on and off. Tumor grade is

Chemo brain. A problem with thinking and memory that can happen during and especially after chemotherapy treatment for cancer.

Chemo fog. See chemo brain; cognitive dysfunction.

Chemotherapy. An aggressive form of chemical drug therapy meant to destroy rapidly growing cells in the body.

Cognitive dysfunction. Loss of intellectual functions such as thinking, remembering, and reasoning of sufficient severity to interfere with daily functioning. Patients with cognitive dysfunction have trouble with verbal recall, basic arithmetic, and concentration.

Cognitive impairment. See cognitive dysfunction.

Denosumab. See Xgiva.

Endocrine. Cells that produce insulin.

Epithelial. Cells that form the epithelium.

Epithelium. The thin tissue forming the outer layer of a body's surface and lining the alimentary canal and other hollow structures.

Exocrine. Cells make digestive juices.

External beam therapy. See external radiation.

External radiation. Sends precisely high levels of radiation direct to cancer cells.

Gastrointestinal tract. Passage along which food passes through the body from mouth to anus; includes esophagus, stomach, intestines.

Hospice. A facility (or home) providing care for the terminally ill.

Hypercalcemia. High levels of calcium in the blood.

Immunotherapy. A type of therapy that uses substances to stimulate or suppress the immune system to help the body fight cancer, infection, and other diseases.

Malignant. Very virulent, infectious, tending to invade normal tissue or to recur after removal; cancerous.

Metastatic. Caused by metastasis.

Metastasis. In metastasis, cancer cells break away from where they first formed (primary cancer), travel through the blood or lymph system, and form new tumors (metastatic tumors) in other parts of the body. The metastatic tumor is the same type of cancer as the primary tumor.

Oncologist. Doctor who treats cancer.

Palia. See X-geva.

Palliative (treatment/drugs/surgery, etc.). Meant to provide relief but not cure.

Pancreas. Organ that makes juices to digest food, insulin, and hormones to regulate blood sugar.

Pancreatectomy, distal. Removal of the head and tail of the pancreas, along with the spleen.

Pancreatectomy, total. Removal of the entire pancreas, part of the small intestine and stomach, common bile duct, spleen, and some lymph nodes.

Poorly differentiated (cells). Malignant cells that bear minimal resemblance to the cell from which they arose. See also cell differentiation.

Primary (cancer/tumor)

Prolia. See Xgeva.

Proton beam radiation. Utilizing pencil beam scanning, proton beams deliver targeted radiation that is only a few millimeters wide.

Proton therapy. See Proton beam radiation.

Radiation Therapy.

Sarcoma

Squamous cells. Flat cells in the outer part of the epidermis that are constantly shed as new ones form.

Targeted therapy.

Xgeva (Denosumab/Prolia). Treats bone problems in people with multiple myeloma or cancer that has spread to the bones. Also treats high blood calcium levels (hypercalcemia) that may occur with cancer. May also be used by adults (and teenagers who have reached final adult height) to treat giant cell tumor of the bone, if they cannot use surgery to treat the disease.

Whipple procedure. Removal of the head of the pancreas, part of the small intestine, the gall bladder, part of the stomach and lymph nodes near the head of the pancreas.

For a definition of cancer types and for discussion of the topics related to the terms in this dictionary, refer to Carl's Cancer Compendium, www.msipress.com/ccc/, where they are described, along with longevity expectations, treatments, and references to research.