

Diagnostics Methods of Cancer-An Editorial Note

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EDITORIAL NOTE

Cancer screening

The best hope for a cure is to diagnose cancer in its earliest stages. With this in mind, speak to your doctor about the types of cancer screenings that may be right for you.

Studies show that screening tests can save lives by detecting cancer early in a few cancers. Screening tests for other cancers are only approved for people who are at a higher risk.

Cancer screening recommendations and guidelines are available from a number of medical associations and patient advocacy groups. Examine the different recommendations with your doctor, and you and he will decide what's best for you based on your personal cancer risk factors.

Cancer diagnosis

To diagnose cancer, your doctor can use one or more methods:

- **Physical exam:** Your doctor may feel for lumps on your body that could indicate a tumor. During a physical examination, he or she can look for anomalies that may suggest the existence of cancer, such as changes in skin color or organ enlargement.
- **Laboratory tests:** Laboratory tests, such as urine and blood tests, can aid your doctor in detecting cancer-related abnormalities. A popular blood test called a complete blood count, for example, can show an unusual number or form of white blood cells in people with leukemia.

- **Imaging tests:** Noninvasive imaging tests enable your doctor to examine your bones and internal organs. A computerized tomography (CT) scan, bone scan, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), positron emission tomography (PET) scan, ultrasound, and X-ray are some of the imaging tests used to diagnose cancer.
- **Biopsy:** During a biopsy, the doctor takes a sample of cells for laboratory examination. A sample can be collected in a variety of ways. The type of cancer you have and where it is located determine which biopsy treatment is best for you. In most cases, a biopsy is the only way to confirm a cancer diagnosis.

Doctors examine cell samples under a microscope in the laboratory. Normal cells have identical sizes and are organized in a logical manner. Cancer cells appear disorganized, with different sizes and no obvious organization.

Cancer stages

Your doctor will work to assess the extent (stage) of your cancer after it has been diagnosed. Your doctor will use the stage of your cancer to assess your medical options and likelihood of a cure.

Imaging tests, such as bone scans or X-rays, can be used as part of the staging process to see whether the cancer has spread to other areas of the body.

Roman numerals are used to denote cancer phases, which range from I to IV, with higher numerals suggesting more advanced cancer. The cancer stage is often indicated by letters or words.

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