

# Cancer Facts

Visit our Website: [modep-life.org](http://modep-life.org)

For more information  
(716) 616-0116  
Email: [modep.buffalo@gmail.com](mailto:modep.buffalo@gmail.com)



THE BROCHURES WERE DEVELOPED FOR INFORMATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY. THE BROCHURES ARE NOT INTENDED FOR THE USE OF SELF-TREATMENT OR TO PROVIDE MEDICAL ADVICE.

© COPYRIGHT 2014 BY MINORITY ORGAN DONATION EDUCATION PROGRAM, INC.  
EXCLUSIVE OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH

## The Health Education Network



The Health Education Network is a Program  
of the Minority Organ Donation  
Education Program, Inc.

## Cancer: Question and Answers

About 1 million new cases of cancer will be diagnosed in the United States in 2004, and about half a million people will die of the disease. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in this country. However, improvements in cancer detection, diagnosis, and treatment have increased the survival rate for many types of cancer. About 60 percent of all people diagnosed with cancer will be alive for at least 5 years after treatment.

### 1. What is cancer?

Cancer is a group of many related diseases that begin in cells, the body's basic building blocks. To understand cancer, it is helpful to know what happens when normal cells become cancerous.

The body is made up of many types of cells. Normally, cells grow and divide to produce more cells, as they are needed to keep the body healthy. Sometimes, this orderly process goes wrong. New cells form when the body does not need them, and old cells do not die when they should. The extra cells form a mass of tissue called a growth or tumor. Not all tumors are cancerous; tumors can be benign or malignant.

**Benign tumors** are not cancer. They can often be removed and, in most cases, they do not come back. Cells in benign tumors do not spread to other parts of the body. Most important, benign tumors are rarely a threat to life.

**Malignant tumors** are cancer. Cells in malignant tumors are abnormal and divide without control or order. Cancer cells invade and destroy the tissue around them. Cancer cells can also break away from a malignant tumor and enter the bloodstream or lymphatic system.

### 2. What causes cancer?

Scientists have learned that cancer is caused by changes (called alterations) in genes that control normal cell growth and cell death. Certain lifestyle and environmental factors can change some normal genes into genes that allow the growth of cancer. Many genetic changes that lead to cancer are the result of tobacco use, diet, exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun, or exposure to carcinogens (cancer-causing substances) in the workplace and in the environment. Some gene alterations are inherited. However, having an inherited gene alteration does not mean that the person is certain to develop cancer, it means that the chance of getting cancer is increased. Scientists continue to examine the factors that may increase a person's chance of developing cancer.

Although being infected with certain viruses, increases the risk of some types of cancer, **cancer is not contagious**. A person cannot catch cancer from someone who has the disease. Scientists also know that an injury or bruise does not cause cancer.

### 4. What are some of the common signs and symptoms of cancer?

Cancer can cause a variety of symptoms. Possible signs of cancer include:

- A thickening or lump in the breast or any other part of the body
- An obvious change in a wart or mole
- A sore that does not heal
- A nagging cough or hoarseness
- Changes in bowel or bladder habits
- Indigestion or difficulty swallowing
- Unexplained changes in weight
- And unusual bleeding or discharge

When these or other symptoms occur, they are **not always** caused by cancer. They can also be caused by infections, benign tumors, or other problems. It is important to see the doctor about any of these symptoms or about other physical changes. Only a doctor can make a diagnosis. A person with these or other symptoms **should not wait** to feel pain early cancer does not usually cause pain.

If symptoms occur, the doctor may order various tests and may recommend a biopsy. A biopsy is usually the most reliable way to know whether a medical problem is cancer. During a biopsy, the doctor removes a sample of tissue from the abnormal area. A pathologist studies the tissue under a microscope to check for cancer cells.