If You Have Gestational Trophoblastic Disease

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What is gestational trophoblastic disease?

Tumors can grow anywhere in the body and happen when cells in the body begin to grow out of control. Some tumors may have cancer cells in them, and some may not. To learn more about how cancers start and spread, see What Is Cancer?¹

Gestational trophoblastic disease (GTD) is a group of rare tumors. The term gestational refers to pregnancy. GTD tumors start in or around a woman's uterus inside her lower belly (abdomen). Inside the uterus is where a baby would grow in a normal pregnancy.

Most GTDs are benign (not cancer) and don't spread to other parts of the body. But some GTDs are malignant (cancerous). All forms of GTD can be treated and most of them can be cured.
Ask your doctor to use these pictures to show you where your tumor is.

Are there different kinds of GTD?

The common types of GTD are:

- Hydatidiform mole
- Invasive mole
- Choriocarcinoma

Hydatidiform mole

A hydatidiform mole is also called a molar pregnancy but it is not possible for a normal baby to form. Hydatidiform moles are not cancerous, but if they are not fully removed, they can become cancerous. There are 2 kinds of hydatidiform moles: complete and partial. Surgery is usually done to remove the mole. Sometimes a medication is needed after surgery to get rid of the entire mole.

Invasive mole

An invasive mole is either a complete or partial hydatidiform mole that has grown deep into the uterus. Invasive moles sometimes go away on their own, but usually need
surgery and medication.

**Choriocarcinoma**

A choriocarcinoma is a cancerous kind of GTD. It can grow quickly and spread to other parts of the body much faster than other kinds of GTDs.

**Questions to ask the doctor**

- Would you please write down the kind of GTD you think I might have?
- Why do you think I have this kind of GTD?
- Is this GTD cancerous?
- What will happen next?

**How does the doctor know I have GTD?**

GTD is most often found either because of abnormal pregnancy symptoms or abnormal test results when a woman is pregnant. These may lead the doctor to order other tests. Here are some of the tests that may be done. Ask your doctor what tests you may need.

- Blood tests
- Urine tests
- Physical exam
- Ultrasound (sonogram)
- X-rays and other scans
- Special lab tests

**Questions to ask the doctor**

- What tests will I need to have?
- Who will do these tests?
- Where will they be done?
- Who can explain them to me?
- How and when will I get the results?
- Who will explain the results to me?
- What do I need to do next?
How serious is my disease?

If you have a GTD, you and the doctor need to know if it is cancerous or not. This is called scoring and staging the GTD. A number system is used for scoring and staging to help a doctor know the extent of the disease. Scoring and staging are done in the lab.

Questions to ask the doctor

- Do you know the score and stage of my GTD?
- If not, how and when will you find out the stage and score of my GTD?
- Will you explain to me what the score and stage means in my case?
- Based on the score and stage of my GTD, how long do you think I’ll live?
- What will happen next?

What kind of treatment will I need?

The treatment plan that’s best for you will depend on:

- The type of GTD you have
- The score and stage of the GTD
- Your overall health
- Your feelings about the treatment and the side effects that may come with it

It is important to begin treatment as soon as possible after GTD is found.

Here are the main methods of treatment. Sometimes the best treatment includes 2 or more kinds of treatment.

- Surgery (main treatment)
- Chemotherapy (may be needed after surgery)
- Radiation therapy (used less often)

What about other treatments that I hear about?

When you have a tumor, you might hear about other ways to treat it or your symptoms.
These might not always be standard medical treatments. These treatments might be vitamins, herbs, special diets, and other things. You may wonder about these treatments.

Some of these are known to help, but many have not been tested. Some have been shown not to help. A few have even been found to be dangerous. Talk to your doctor about anything you’re thinking about using, whether it’s a vitamin, a diet, or anything else.

Questions to ask the doctor

It is important to discuss all of your treatment options, including their goals and possible side effects, with your doctors to help make the decision that fits your needs. It’s also very important to ask questions if there is anything you’re not sure about. Some questions to ask are:

- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- What’s the goal of this treatment? Do you think it could cure my GTD?
- Will treatment include surgery? If so, who will do the surgery?
- What will the surgery be like?
- Will I need other types of treatment too?
- What side effects could I have from these treatments?
- Will I be able to get pregnant after treatment?
- Is there a clinical trial that might be right for me?
- What about special vitamins or diets that friends tell me about? How will I know if they are safe?
- How soon do I need to start treatment?
- What will happen after treatment?

Help getting through treatment for GTD

Your health care team will be your first source of information and support, but there are other resources for help when you need it. You might or might not need ongoing treatment and care for GTD. Tests and check-ups may be needed to follow-up even if more treatment is not needed. Ask your doctor what to expect.

Having GTD and dealing with surgery and treatment can be hard, but it can also be a time to look at your life in new ways. You might be thinking about how to improve your health. Call us at 1-800-227-2345 or talk to your health care team to find out what you
can do to feel better.

You can’t change the fact that you have or had GTD. What you can change is how you live the rest of your life – making healthy choices and feeling as good as you can.

**Hyperlinks**

2. [http://www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**Words to know**

**Benign** (be-nine): Not cancer; not malignant.

**Choriocarcinoma** (KOR-ee-oh-KAR-sih-NOH-muh): Cancer that starts in a woman’s uterus (womb). The abnormal cells start in the tissue where a baby would normally grow in the uterus. This is a type of gestational trophoblastic disease.

**Gestational** (jeh-STAY-shuh-nul): Refers to pregnancy.

**Hydatidiform** (HY-duh-TIH-di-form) **mole**: Also called a molar pregnancy. A mole is a rare mass or growth that forms inside the uterus (womb) and at first acts like a pregnancy but a baby cannot form.

**Malignant** (muh-lig-nunt): Cancerous; dangerous or likely to cause death if untreated.

**Metastasis** (muh-TAS-tuh-sis): Cancer cells that have spread from where they started to other places in the body.

**Trophoblast or trophoblastic** (TROH-fuh-blast): New cells or cell growth that normally end up forming mature cells that provide nutrition for a pregnancy.

**Ultrasound** (ul-truh-sound): Also called a sonogram. This is an imaging test in which high-frequency sound waves are used to outline a part of the body. The sound wave echoes are picked up and displayed on a computer screen.

**Uterus** (YEW-tuh-rus): Also called the womb. The pear-shaped organ in a woman’s pelvis that holds a growing baby.
How can I learn more?

We have a lot more information for you. You can find it online at www.cancer.org (http://www.cancer.org)². Or, you can call our toll-free number at 1-800-227-2345 to talk to one of our cancer information specialists.

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