



# After a Liver Cancer Diagnosis



Liver cancer is a type of cancer that starts in the liver. The liver is a large organ located under your right ribs that helps the body digest food. It also gets rid of waste products and helps with blood clotting. You cannot live without a liver. If you have been told you have liver cancer, you've probably already had blood tests, scans, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of liver cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

## Treatment for liver cancer

Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of the liver cancer. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

Surgery may not be possible depending on the location of the tumor. Surgery can be done to remove the tumor and sometimes a part of the liver near the tumor. This is called a partial hepatectomy. Sometimes, removing the whole liver and doing a liver transplant is the best option. Talk with your doctor about the kind of surgery you may need and what you can expect.

Other treatment for liver cancer can include tumor ablation, radiation, chemo, targeted therapy, and immunotherapy. Often, more than one kind of treatment is needed. Several treatments can be used to help prevent or relieve symptoms of liver cancer. Sometimes, they are given along with other treatments. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

## Be sure to ask:

- What type of liver cancer do I have?
- What stage is my liver cancer, and what does that mean? Do I need more tests?
- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- What is the goal of treatment?
- Will treatment include surgery? Can all of the tumor be removed?
- Do I need part or all of my liver removed? If I need a transplant, what is the next step?
- Will I need other types of treatment, too?

## What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need surgery, the side effects you might have depend on how much of your liver is removed. If you need other types of treatment, your cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you with any side effects. You might also get tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for liver cancer will have the same side effects. For example, a person might have surgery to take out the part of the liver with the tumor or to do a liver transplant. The side effects of these surgeries are different from the side effects of radiation, chemo, or targeted therapy. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

## Be sure to ask:

- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?
- Do I need to change what I eat during treatment?
- If I need a liver transplant, what happens after I go home? Are there special medicines I need to take?
- Are there any clinical trials that might be right for me?

## What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular tests to check how your liver is working, if your cancer has come back, or if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. Surgery and other treatments may change how your liver works. This could affect your body in different ways. You may have some digestive problems. If you have a liver transplant, special medicines are often needed to help prevent infections. You might also need medicine to help keep your body from rejecting the new liver. Be sure to ask the doctor what to expect, and let them know if you have any problems.

People who have had liver cancer are at risk of having it again or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if your liver cancer has come back.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

### Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary and follow-up plan?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Will I need tests to check how my liver is working?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

## Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Not smoking and not drinking alcohol may help lower your risk of the cancer growing or coming back. If you have hepatitis B or hepatitis C, getting treated for the infection may help reduce any further damage to your liver. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, eating well, and being active can also help you stay healthy and may lower your risk of getting other cancers. If you've had a liver transplant, you might need to take certain medicines that help your body adjust to it and to help prevent infections. They may be needed for a short or long time.

## Dealing with your feelings

Having liver cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about them, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/livercancer](https://cancer.org/livercancer) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

