

# MANAGING YOUR STOMACH CANCER

Stomach cancer refers to a cancerous growth in the stomach. Most cases are diagnosed in people older than 65.



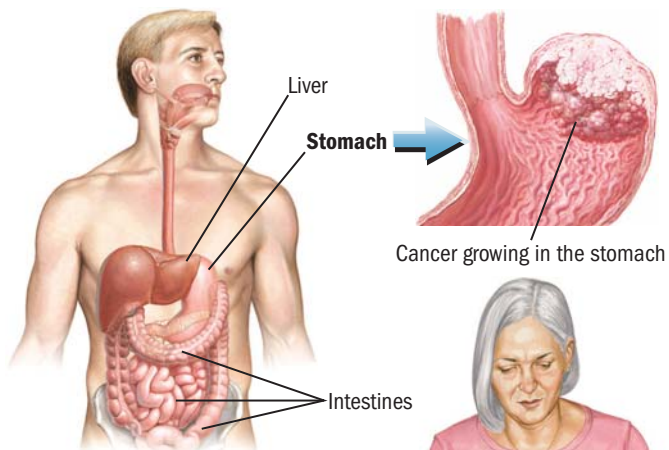
## What Is Stomach Cancer?

Stomach (gastric) cancer refers to a cancerous (malignant) growth in the stomach.

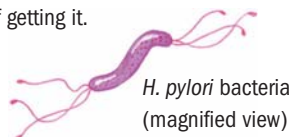
These cancers occur in about 7 people per 100,000 in the United States. They are more common in Japan (more than 80 people per 100,000). Most cases are diagnosed in people older than 65.

## What Causes Stomach Cancer?

The cause is unknown, but certain things increase chances of getting this disease. Diets high in nitrates may make this cancer more likely. Nitrates (found in smoked and salted foods) are converted to nitrites by bacteria, and nitrites are cancer-causing substances. Also, people whose stomach is infected with bacteria called *Helicobacter pylori* may have greater chances of getting stomach cancer. There is also a slight increase in risk if there is a family history of stomach cancer.



The cause isn't known, but people who have diets high in nitrates and infections with *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria have increased chances of getting it.



*H. pylori* bacteria (magnified view)

Pain in the abdomen, nausea, and loss of appetite are common symptoms.

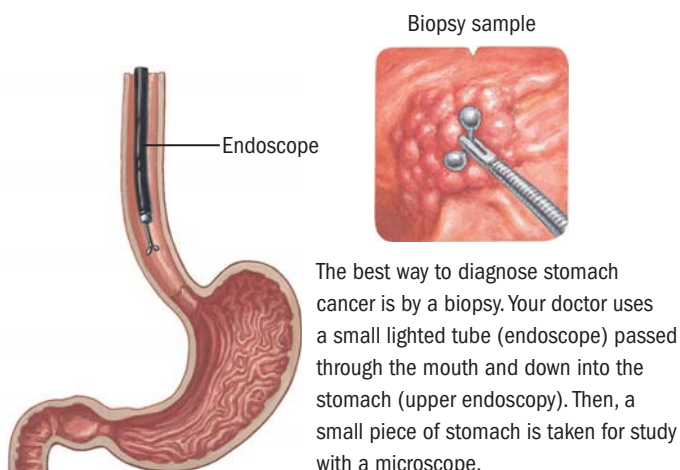


## What Are the Symptoms of Stomach Cancer?

People with early stomach cancers may not have symptoms. As the tumor grows, people have abdominal (belly) pain, nausea, and loss of appetite. Other complaints are abdominal bloating after eating, trouble swallowing, heartburn, weight loss, blood in stools, a mass that can be felt, fullness in the stomach after meals, and fluid in the abdomen (ascites).

## How Is Stomach Cancer Diagnosed?

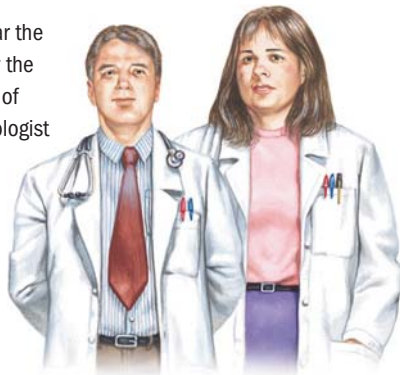
The only sure way to diagnose stomach cancer is with a biopsy. The doctor uses a small lighted tube (scope) passed through the mouth, down the esophagus, and into the stomach (upper endoscopy). If the doctor finds abnormal areas, a sample is taken and studied with a microscope.



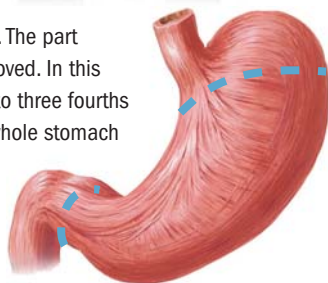
The best way to diagnose stomach cancer is by a biopsy. Your doctor uses a small lighted tube (endoscope) passed through the mouth and down into the stomach (upper endoscopy). Then, a small piece of stomach is taken for study with a microscope.

## MANAGING YOUR STOMACH CANCER

Treatment depends on how far the cancer spread (its stage). For the best care, you'll want a team of specialists, including an oncologist and surgeon, in addition to your primary care doctor.



Surgery gives the only chance for cure. The part of the stomach with the cancer is removed. In this operation, a subtotal gastrectomy, up to three fourths of the stomach can be removed. The whole stomach may also be taken out.



Dashed lines show the part that may be removed depending on where the cancer is located.



Eat a healthy diet.

Talk to your doctor if you need emotional support. Find a support group if you think that would help.



Call your doctor if you continue to have abdominal pain or blood in your stool. Always keep your follow-up appointments.



### FROM THE DESK OF

#### NOTES

### How Is Stomach Cancer Treated?

Treatment depends on how far the cancer spread (its stage). Surgery is the only chance for cure. Surgery includes complete removal of the cancer by taking out part of the stomach (subtotal gastrectomy) or near-total removal of the stomach with nearby lymph glands.

People with advanced cancer may have chemotherapy, usually a combination of different drugs. The doctor will recommend other doctors including an oncologist (specialist in cancer) be involved in care.

Radiation therapy doesn't work well for stomach cancer and may be used only to help reduce pain.

### DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Stomach Cancer:

- ✓ **DO** tell your doctor about a family history of stomach cancer and recurrent *H. pylori* infection, which may be linked to stomach cancer.
- ✓ **DO** keep your follow-up doctor appointments. A team of doctors including your primary care doctor, surgeon and oncologist, will care for you.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have abdominal pain or blood in your stool.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have a fever during chemotherapy.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have pain or abnormal drainage around the incision after surgery.
- ⊗ **DON'T** ignore stomach pain or blood in the stool. These may be signs of serious problems.
- ⊗ **DON'T** be afraid to ask for second opinions.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following source:

• National Cancer Institute  
Tel: (800) 422-6237

**Website:** <http://www.cancer.gov>

• American College of Surgeons  
Tel: (800) 621-4111

**Website:** <http://www.facs.org>