

# Primary Liver Cancer

## Information for patients and their families

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Cancer that starts in the liver is called primary liver cancer. Other names are hepatocellular cancer. It is a very different cancer than cancer that starts in another part of the body and spreads to the liver. This handout contains information about primary liver cancer and treatment.

There is a lot of information to take in when you first hear that you have cancer. As well, there is information and advice that you may hear or read online that that may not be correct or pertain to you.

Please let us know what you do not understand about this cancer and its related treatment, and how we can help you.

Oncologist: \_\_\_\_\_ Nurse: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Clinic hours for phone messages: Monday to Friday**

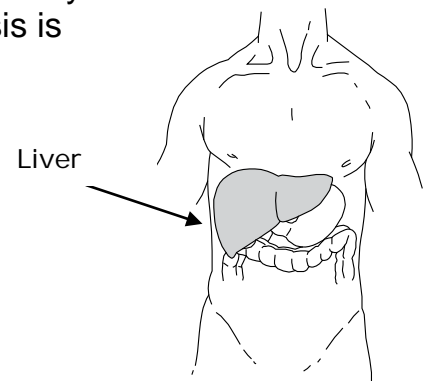
9:00 am to 4:00 pm – 905-387-9495, ext. \_\_\_\_\_

## **What causes liver cancer?**

We cannot say for certain what causes liver cancer. It usually happens with patients who have some cirrhosis. Cirrhosis is when healthy liver cells are replaced by scar tissue.

Causes of cirrhosis include:

- history of having Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C
- viral or parasitic infections
- toxins
- drinking alcohol



## **What does the stage of liver cancer mean?**

The stage of cancer describes how much the cancer has spread. It is important to know the stage because it helps us to:

- plan treatment options such as surgery
- plan and design the surgery
- offer options other than surgery

To determine the stage, medical tests are needed which generally include CT scans or MRIs. Sometimes a biopsy is needed. A biopsy is when tissue samples are taken and examined under the microscope.

## Treatment

Your treatment plan depends on your personal preference (what you think is best for you) after you have considered your:

- stage of liver cancer
- treatment options with the risks and benefits
- general health

You and your health care team will discuss the treatment plan that is best for you. Your doctor will do tests throughout treatment. These tests help to see if the treatment is working and how well you are tolerating the treatment. The tests help you and the health care team decide if treatment should continue or change.

## Treatment options

### Surgery

Surgery is generally the best option to try to cure primary liver cancer. The surgeon must study your x-rays carefully and be able to design an operation that will remove the cancer while leaving enough liver to keep you healthy. Not all patients will have cancers that can be removed with surgery.

### Radio Frequency Ablation, or RFA

This is a procedure done in the hospital. The doctor, an Interventional Radiologist, inserts a needle through the skin into the tumour in the liver. The needle delivers radiofrequency waves which heats the cancer cells and destroys them. You will be sedated for this treatment and the doctor will freeze (numb) the skin before the needle is inserted.

### Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a drug used to destroy cancer cells in the body. It can be given through an intravenous (IV), or taken by mouth. Before you start on chemotherapy there is a chemotherapy teaching class that we want you to attend. During the class you will learn more about chemotherapy, how it is given and how to take care of yourself.

### Biotherapy

This is also known as targeted therapy. It is taken by mouth and the pill for liver tumours is called Nexavar. It interferes with cancer cells by slowing their growth and spread to other parts of the body. Before you start on Nexavar, there is a teaching class that we want you to attend. During the class you will learn more about biotherapy and how to take care of yourself.

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### **Trans-Arterial Chemo Embolization, or TACE**

The TACE procedure is done in the hospital by a doctor, an Interventional Radiologist. The doctor inserts a small tube through a blood vessel into the liver. The tube goes to the tumour and then chemotherapy is injected into the tumour which destroys the cancer cells in the liver. After the chemotherapy is injected, then another substance is injected to block the blood flow to the tumour. You will be sedated for this treatment and the doctor will freeze (numb) the skin before the needle is inserted.

### **Liver transplant**

This may be an option if you are healthy and the cancer is found early, or if the tumours are small. In some patients when liver surgery is not an option, a liver transplant may be recommended to remove the cancer.

### **Clinical trials**

Clinical trials are research studies. Feel free to ask your healthcare team about any clinical trials that you may participate in.

## **Supportive Care**

You may feel weak, tired and have other medical and health problems. Please share your concerns with your health care team. Supportive Care Services can be used at anytime throughout your illness and cancer experience. If you would like to meet with a member of our Pain and Symptom Management Team or Mental Health Team, please ask your doctor or nurse for a referral or call the number below.

Other services include:

- an aboriginal patient navigator
- a chaplain
- a registered dietitian
- a social worker

Call 905-387-9711, ext. 64315, Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

## **Symptom Assessment**

When you come for each appointment, please complete a symptom assessment. There are computers throughout the cancer centre to complete the assessment or you can complete it at home <https://isaac.cancercare.on.ca>. Please discuss your symptoms with your health care team so they can better understand how you are feeling.

## If I smoke, should I quit?

We recommend that you quit, but realize this is difficult. There are health benefits to you from quitting. Quitting smoking can:

- make your cancer treatments work better
- reduce your side effects
- improve your healing and overall health

If you want to quit, there is a lot of help and support available for you. You may want to talk with your family doctor or pharmacist about quitting and what medications may help you quit.

For support or help to stay smoke-free:

- talk with a member of your health care team
- contact Smokers' Helpline toll free at 1-877-513-5333 or visit [www.smokershelpline.ca](http://www.smokershelpline.ca)

## Other resources

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Patient and Family Resource Centre, Level 1 – JCC</li><li>• Supportive Care, Level 2 – JCC</li></ul>	<a href="http://www.jcc.hhsc.ca">www.jcc.hhsc.ca</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canadian Cancer Society</li></ul>	<a href="http://www.cancer.ca">www.cancer.ca</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Canadian Liver Foundation</li></ul>	<a href="http://www.liver.ca">www.liver.ca</a>

## Your questions/notes

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