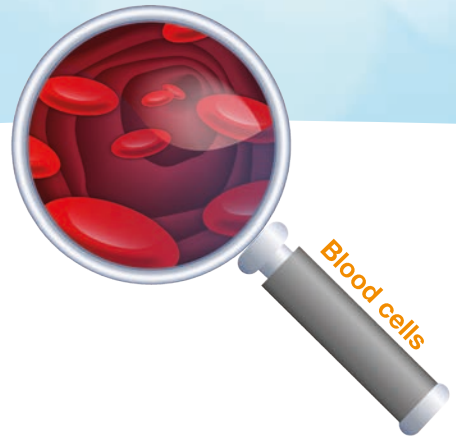




Phyllis
Tuckwell
Hospice Care
...because every
day is precious

What is cancer?





Every living thing is made up of 'cells'. Our bodies are made up from trillions of cells. We have lots of different cells that do different jobs: we have blood cells to keep making more healthy blood, muscle cells to keep making new healthy muscle, brain cells to keep our brains healthy and working well, and lots more! Cells absorb nutrients from food and turn it into energy to help our bodies keep growing and stay healthy. There are billions of normal cells in each person's body all the time; a bit like a battery you might put in a remote control toy, cells eventually get older, run out of energy and die. But cells are clever: they grow and divide all the time, creating new cells as the older ones die off so our bodies always have lots of young and healthy cells whizzing around us, keeping us healthy and strong, helping us grow, repair and stay healthy.

As we said, healthy cells grow and divide to replace worn out cells that die. Cancer happens when cells go wrong and keep on growing and dividing very quickly all the time.

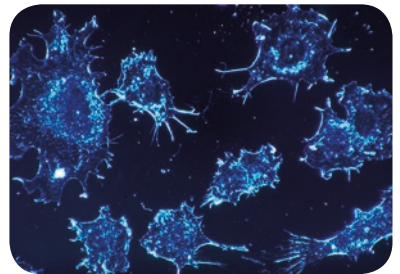
What is cancer?

Unlike the normal cells, cancer cells just continue to grow and divide out of control and do not die when they are supposed to.

Cancer cells usually group or clump together. Sometimes this is called a 'tumour'.

A growing tumour becomes a lump of cancer cells that can destroy the normal cells around it and damage the body's healthy tissues. This can make someone very ill.

Sometimes cancer cells break away from the original tumour, travelling to other areas and cells of the body, where they continue to keep growing out of control and can go on to form new tumours. This is how cancer can spread around a body.



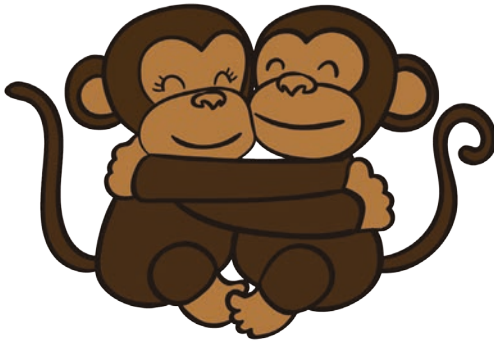
Cancer cells

Why do some people get cancer?

Doctors are not sure why some people get cancer and others do not. They do know that certain 'life style' choices can increase a person's risk of getting cancer, for example, smoking cigarettes.



We do know that cancer is **not** contagious. You cannot catch it from someone else who has it — cancer is not caused by germs, like colds or flu are. So do not be afraid of anyone with cancer. You can talk to, play with, and hug someone with cancer.



The person may look different, because they are ill. If you are worried about hurting them, tell them and ask if it is OK to cuddle them.

Children cannot get cancer from anything they do. Some children think that a minor accident like a bump on the head causes brain cancer. **This is not true!** Children do not do anything wrong to get cancer.

Some children may think that if they are naughty they will get cancer. **This is not true!** Some children may think that bad people get cancer. **This is also not true!**

You probably know a child who has had a cold or chickenpox — maybe even you. But you probably do not know any children who have had cancer, because it is very rare.



How do doctors find out if someone has cancer?



It can take a while for a doctor to work out if someone has cancer.

If the doctor suspects cancer, he or she can do tests to find out if that is the problem. A doctor might order X-rays and blood tests and recommend the person go to see an 'oncologist'.

An oncologist is a special type of doctor who takes care of and treats people with cancer. The oncologist will probably want to do other tests to find out if someone really has cancer. If they have, the tests can work out what kind of cancer it is and if it has spread to other parts of the body. Based on what the doctor finds out from these tests, he will decide the best way to treat it.

The sooner cancer is found and treatment begins the better that person's chances are for getting better.

There are many, many different types of cancer. Depending on what type a person has will decide how the doctors treat it and what type of medicines they will use.

How do doctors try to make someone better from cancer?

Treatment is when the doctors use different types of medicines to try and make the cancer go away. Sometimes they may need to do an operation (surgery) to try and take the tumour away. They may also use a treatment called chemotherapy, or radiation — or sometimes a combination of all these treatments. The oncologist will decide this based on what cancer the person has.

Chemotherapy is the use of special anti-cancer medicines to try and make the cancer go away. These medicines are sometimes taken as a pill, but usually are given through a special intravenous line, also called an IV. An IV is a tiny plastic straw-like tube that is put into a vein through someone's skin, usually on the arm. The other end of this is then attached to a bag that holds the medicine. The medicine flows from the bag into the vein, which puts the medicine into the blood, where it can travel throughout the body, attacking cancer cells. Chemotherapy is usually given over a number of weeks to months.

Radiation therapy uses very high-energy waves, (invisible waves that can pass through most parts of the body like an X-Ray), to damage and destroy cancer cells. It can cause tumours to shrink and even go away completely.

With both chemotherapy and radiation, people may experience something known as a 'side effect'. A side effect is when the treatment makes a person feel ill in addition to the cancer. Radiation and anti-cancer drugs are very good at destroying cancer cells but, unfortunately, they also destroy healthy cells. This can make a person feel very sick and even be sick, have an upset tummy, make them so tired it is difficult to stay awake, loss of appetite, or hair loss.

With radiation, a person might have red or irritated skin in the area that's being treated. But all these problems go away and hair grows back after the treatment is over. During the treatment, certain medicines can help a person feel better.

While treatment is still going on, a person might not be able to attend work or be around crowds of people. The person needs to rest and avoid getting infections, such as the flu or a cold, when he or she already is not feeling well. The body may have more trouble fighting off infections because of the cancer or side effects of the treatment.



Getting better

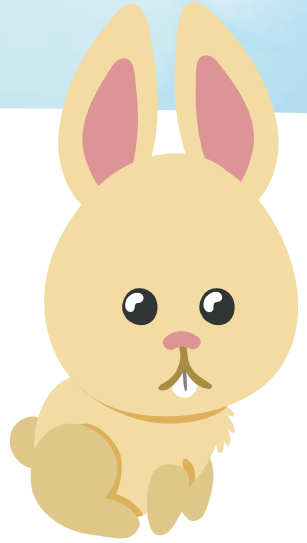
Remission is a great word for anyone who has cancer. It means all signs of cancer are gone from the body. After surgery or treatment with radiation or chemotherapy, a doctor will then do tests to see if the cancer is still there. If there are no signs of cancer, then the person is in remission.

Remission is the goal when any person with cancer goes to the hospital for treatment. Sometimes, this means additional chemotherapy or radiation might be needed for a while to keep cancer cells from coming back. When treatment finishes the person will continue to have regular check-ups.



What is death?

Why do people die?



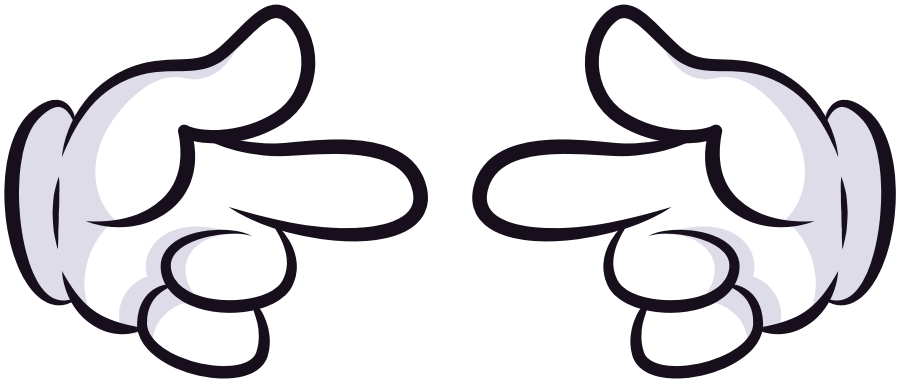
When someone is ill, doctors can usually make them better. But sometimes the doctors cannot make people better and they die. This might be because their bodies have become too weak and tired from the disease (like cancer) and treatment to recover. It might be because they are very old and their body isn't able to make many new cells anymore.

Death is when the body stops working and functioning. When somebody dies their body stops working. A dead body does not breathe because their lungs are no longer working and the heart has stopped. A dead body cannot move, it will be totally quiet and still. A dead body cannot feel, hear, see, smell, breathe, eat or feel any pain.

Because their body has stopped working, dead people do not need anything to eat or to drink and they cannot feel cold. Dead people stay dead for ever, much as we might like them to, they cannot come back to life.

Is it my fault?

Sometimes people especially children often feel guilty that somehow they may have caused the death. **Nothing you did or said made the person ill or die.**



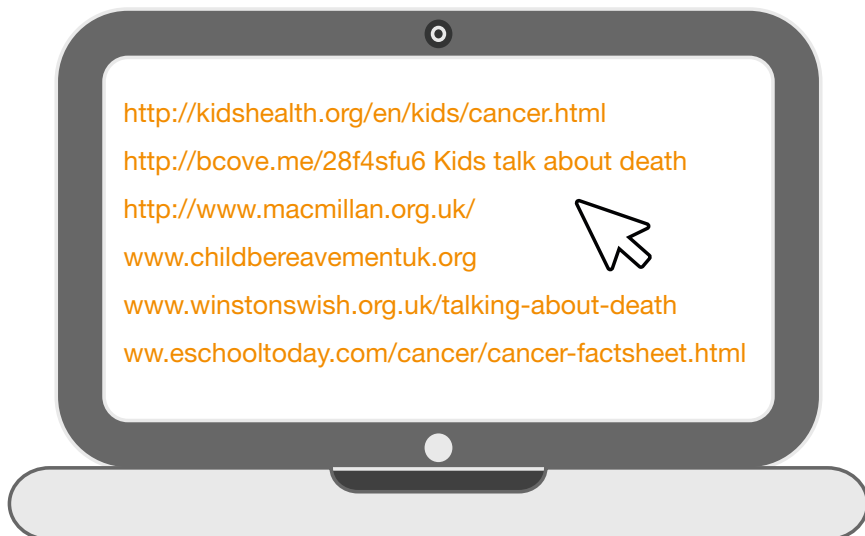
Grief

'Grief' is the word used to describe the normal and natural reaction to how we feel when someone special dies. We are all different and there is no set way for what you may feel and when. Many children find it very difficult to concentrate in lessons at school and you may not sleep as well which means you may feel more tired than usual. You may notice you experience strong feelings such as feeling very, very happy or very, very sad and even very angry sometimes: this is all NORMAL!

It may be helpful to have someone you like and trust to talk to and support you, maybe another family member, a friend or an adult at school. Sharing how you feel may not be easy or feel very helpful but it is a healthy way of coping with your loss.



References





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little rays

Little Rays could help...

Little Rays is a group for children aged 5-12, who have experienced the death of a loved one.

You may be feeling sad, lonely, angry or confused. Perhaps you feel different and don't think anyone understands you. Little Rays gives you the opportunity to explore and share your thoughts and feelings through storytelling and crafts.

For further details contact our Patient & Family Support Team:



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