

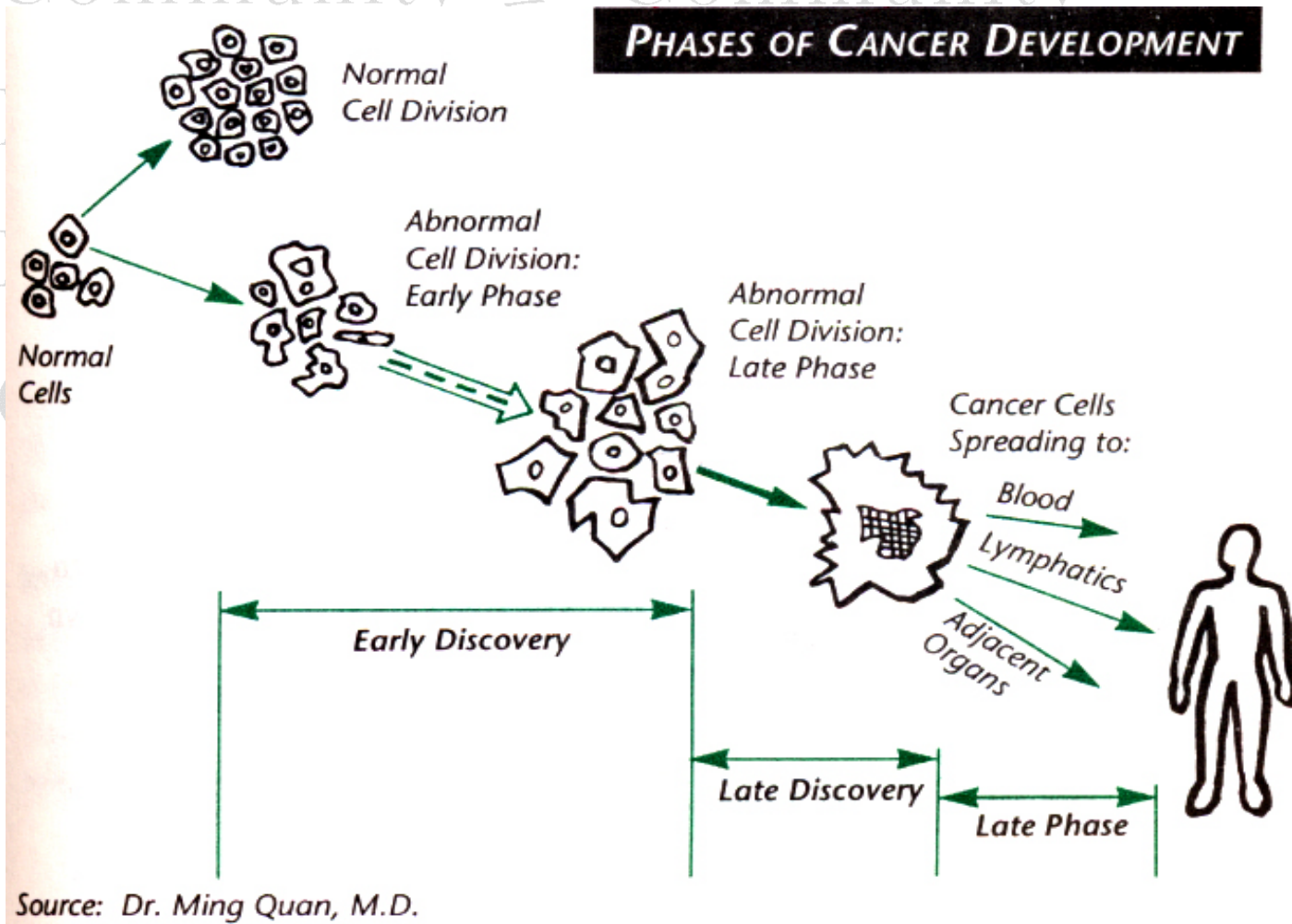
Chapter 1 What is Cancer?

CANCER is a group of many diseases, which are due to uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. These cells may grow into masses of tissue called tumors. Tumors may be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). Malignant tumors invade and destroy nearby tissues and organs and can even spread (metastasize) to other parts of the body.

CANCER FACTS

Although many people have some understanding of cancer, most people don't like to think about cancer or know how to cope with it.

Cancers that are found early may be easier to cure. Getting regular checkups and paying attention to early warning signs are two of the reasons current cancer survival rate is much higher than it was in the past.



What are the Common Cancers and Their Symptoms?

- LUNGS: Persistent cough, coughing up blood, shortness of breath.
- BREASTS: Lumps in breasts, changing of shape, nipple discharge.
- COLON AND RECTUM: Changes in bowel habits, rectal bleeding, blood in stool, red or black stool.
- PROSTATE (male): Difficulty with or painful urination; frequent urination, especially at night.
- UTERUS, OVARIES, AND CERVIX (female): Postmenopausal bleeding, abnormal vaginal discharge, abdominal swelling, painful intercourse.
- LIVER: Feeling of fullness at the right upper quadrant of the abdomen, sometimes jaundice or pain caused by an enlarged liver, weight loss, nausea, vomiting.
- NASOPHARYNX: All of the following can be symptoms of nasopharyngeal cancer:
 - Nose: Blockage of breathing passageway, pus discharge, bleeding.
 - Ear: Gradual or complete loss of hearing, ringing in the ears, earache, pus discharge.
 - Neck: One or more lumps.
 - Throat: Hoarseness, difficulty in swallowing.
- SKIN: Delayed healing of wounds; changes in shape, size, or color of a wart or mole; sudden appearance of mole or wart.

What Should You Do After Noticing the Above Symptoms?

If you notice any of the above signs or symptoms, contact a physician immediately. These symptoms may be caused by illnesses other than cancer. Remember, pain is usually not an early warning sign of cancer.

Some people attribute these symptoms to old age and therefore, ignore them. Please do not think that these symptoms are not important enough to mention to your physician. Ask your physician if you have any questions. Write them down before your appointment and record the answers.

What Tests Should be Done Regularly?

Your doctor will recommend which test(s) and the frequency of each test according to your age, gender, and medical and family history. If you have had cancer in the past, or a family history of cancer, or other illnesses, testing should be more frequent.

- FECAL OCCULT BLOOD TEST: Collection of one or several stool samples to test for unseen blood in stool. Blood in stool may be an indication of cancer of the colon or rectum. Your doctor can give you a simple kit to collect stool samples at home to be mailed or delivered to your doctor's office.
- DIGITAL RECTAL EXAM: With gloved hands, the doctor examines the rectum for prostatic tumors in men or rectal tumors in men and women.

- **SIGMOIDOSCOPY:** The doctor examines the rectum and the lower part of the colon with a special instrument.
- **COLONOSCOPY:** Similar to sigmoidoscopy, but the entire colon can be checked and suspicious lumps can be cut out and checked for cancer (biopsied).
- **DOUBLE CONTRAST BARIUM ENEMA:** Patient is given a chemical (barium) solution to drink, which helps to outline the colon and rectum during an x-ray.
- **PROSTATE SPECIFIC ANTIGEN (PSA):** A test used to determine prostate specific antigen level in the blood in men. The higher the level, the more likely the chance of prostate cancer.
- **PELVIC EXAM AND PAP SMEAR:** Pelvic exam is the examination of the female reproductive organs. Using a small instrument and gloved hands, the doctor examines the vagina, uterus, and ovaries. A Pap smear is usually done at the same time as the pelvic exam. Cells from the cervix are removed for examination under a microscope for any abnormality. A Pap smear is not a painful procedure.
- **MAMMOGRAM AND CLINICAL BREAST EXAM:** A mammogram is an examination of the breast using low-dose energy X-ray. It is used to detect abnormalities of the breasts. Clinical breast exam is performed by a health professional (doctor or nurse) as part of a health exam. It helps to detect changes in the breasts.

If any of these test results is positive, it does not mean that you have cancer. It means that further tests are necessary. If cancer is suspected, a biopsy is needed to confirm it. Tissue is removed from the tumor to be examined under a microscope to determine if it is cancerous or not.

What If You Find Out You Have Cancer?

If the test result shows that you have cancer, you should receive treatment as soon as possible. Cancer is an illness where abnormal cells grow. If you do not begin treatment immediately, the abnormal cells will continue to grow and invade healthy tissues.

Today, there are many ways to treat cancer. Get second opinions from several doctors to determine the best treatment plan for you. You should also ask your doctor if you should consult an Oncologist. If you have questions about your diagnosis and treatment results, ask your doctor.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO REDUCE CANCER RISK?

About 80% of cancer cases are related to lifestyle and environmental factors. By reducing or eliminating exposure to cancer causing agents (carcinogens), risks of getting cancers could be lowered.

Here are some cancer risk reduction tips:

- Control weight
- Don't smoke.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation, (1-2 drinks a day) if at all.
- Avoid too much sunlight, especially from 10am to 4pm (wear protective clothing, use sun screens with a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of 15 or above).
- Avoid unnecessary X-rays.
- Avoid contact with asbestos and petroleum products.
- Follow health and safety rules in the work place.
- Eat foods high in fiber (fruits, vegetables, whole grains) and low in fat.
- Limit consumption of salt-cured, salt-pickled, smoked foods (e.g. salted fish).
- Discuss the pros and cons of estrogen replacement with your doctor, if you are a post-menopausal woman.
 - Include cancer-related check-ups in your regular physical exam.
 - Learn the warning signals.

WHAT ARE SOME WARNING SIGNALS OF CANCER?

1. Change in bowel or bladder habits
2. A sore that does not heal
3. Unusual bleeding or discharge
4. Thickening or lump in breast or elsewhere
5. Indigestion or difficulty in swallowing that is long-lasting
6. Obvious change in wart or mole
7. Nagging cough or hoarseness
8. Unexplained weight changes