

Glossary

A

ablative therapy

Treatment that removes or destroys the function of an organ or system. For example, high dose chemotherapy and radiation before a bone marrow transplant is considered ablative therapy because it wipes out your immune system.

absolute neutrophil count (ANC)

The percentage of neutrophils and bands that are part of your total white blood count. The lower your ANC, the more prone and unable to fight infection.

adjuvant therapy

Treatment used in addition to your main treatment. Often refers to chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or immunotherapy added after surgery to increase the chances of curing your disease or keeping it in check.

alopecia

Hair loss. This often occurs as a result of chemotherapy or from radiation therapy to the head. In most cases, the hair grows back after treatment ends.

alternative therapy

Non-conventional treatment that may not be medically proven. Some alternative therapies may have dangerous or even life-threatening side effects. With others, the main danger is that you may lose the opportunity to benefit from conventional therapy. It is recommended that you discuss the use of alternative therapies with your health care team. See also complementary therapy .

amputation

The surgical removal of a diseased limb or body part.

analgesic

Relieves pain.

anemia

Low red blood cell count which can cause you to feel fatigued and have shortness of breath. Anemia can be caused by a variety of conditions and diseases. A blood transfusion may be required.

anesthetic

Removing sensation by medication, either in a limited area of the body (local or regional) or generally.

anesthesiologist

A doctor who specializes in giving medicines or other agents that prevent or relieve pain, especially during surgery.

anorexia

Lack or loss of appetite.

antibiotic

A medication used to kill or limit the growth of bacterial micro-organisms that cause infection. Drug used to kill organisms that cause disease. Since some cancer treatments can reduce your body's ability to fight infection, antibiotics may be used to treat or prevent (prophylactic) these infections.

antiemetic

Prevents or reduces nausea and vomiting.

antifungal

A medicine that kills fungus, organisms that cause infections. Children undergoing treatment for cancer are more vulnerable to fungal infections.

antigen

A foreign substance that the body recognizes and reacts against through its immune system.

antihistamine

A medicine used to relieve the symptoms of allergies like hives, stuffy nose, etc.

antioxidants

Compounds that hold back chemical reactions with oxygen (oxidation) and are thought to reduce the risk of some cancers. Examples are vitamins C and E and beta-carotene.

autologous

Of oneself – an autologous bone marrow transplant uses your own bone marrow.

B**benign**

Not malignant or cancerous.

biopsy

Removal of small sample of body tissue for examination, to establish a diagnosis.

blood count

A lab study to evaluate the amount of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets.

blood transfusion

The infusion of red blood cells or platelets or plasma into your blood stream to try to replace blood loss, to support low blood counts due to chemotherapy, to correct anemia, or to correct other blood abnormalities.

bone marrow

The spongy material in the centre of the large bones of the body which makes blood cells; the factory of the blood.

bone marrow transplant (BMT)

Procedure in which a patient's bone marrow is destroyed by chemotherapy or radiotherapy and replaced with new bone marrow from a donor.

bone scan

An imaging method that gives important information about the bones, including the location of cancer that may have spread to the bones. A low-dose radioactive substance is injected into a vein and pictures are taken to see where the radioactivity collects, indicating an abnormality.

C

cancer

Develops when cells in your body begin to grow out of control. Normal cells grow, divide, and die naturally. Instead of dying, cancer cells continue to grow and form new abnormal cells. Cancer cells often travel to other body parts where they grow and replace normal tissue. This process is called metastasis. Cancer cells develop because of damage to DNA. DNA is in every cell and directs all its activities. When DNA becomes damaged, the body is usually able to repair it. In cancer cells, the damage is not repaired. People can inherit damaged DNA, which accounts for inherited cancers. Many times, DNA becomes damaged by exposure to something in the environment, like smoking. Most cancers have no known cause.

carcinogen

A cancer-causing agent.

carcinoma

Cancer that arises from epithelial tissue (the lining of an internal organ or the skin).

cell

The basic unit of which all living things are made. Cells replace themselves by splitting and forming new cells (mitosis). The processes that control the formation of new cells and the death of old cells are disrupted in cancer.

cerebrospinal fluid

The fluid produced within the brain that circulates around the brain and spinal cord. It is tested during a lumbar puncture.

clinical trial

Human research studies that test new drugs or treatments and compare them to current, standard treatments. Before a new treatment is used on people, it is studied in the lab. If lab studies suggest the treatment works, it is tested with patients. These human studies are called clinical trials. Questions the researchers want to answer are: Does this treatment work? Does it work better than the one we use now? What side effects does it cause? Do the benefits outweigh the risks? Your doctor may suggest a clinical trial. Participation is voluntary.

chronic

Long-standing or long-lasting.

chemotherapy

Anti-cancer drugs or medications.

complementary therapy

Therapies used in addition to conventional therapy. Some complementary therapies may help relieve certain symptoms of cancer, relieve side effects of conventional cancer therapy, or improve a patient's sense of well-being.

CT or CAT scan (Computerized Axial Tomography)

Shows cross-section views of various organs being studied as X-rays pass through the patient's body at many angles. Used for diagnosis and monitoring the effects of treatment.

cross-matching

Determining whether blood from the donor is compatible with that from the patient, in preparation for transfusion.

D

diagnosis

Identifying a disease by its signs or symptoms, and by using imaging procedures and laboratory findings.

DNA (DeoxyriboNucleic Acid)

Chemical substance carrying inherited information.

dehydration

Excessive loss of fluids from your body.

E

electrolytes

A general term for the many minerals necessary to provide the proper environment for the cells of your body. Common electrolytes include calcium, sodium, potassium, and chloride.

exploratory

Surgery undertaken to investigate a situation that other, primarily external diagnostic tests have failed to clarify.

endocrine

To do with hormones.

excision

Cutting out.

F

febrile

Having a temperature above normal.

fungal infection

A group of micro-organisms larger than either bacteria or viruses, which occasionally cause serious infection when your resistance is lowered.

G

gastroenterologist

A doctor who specializes in diseases of the digestive (gastrointestinal) tract.

general anesthetic

A medication which puts you to sleep to prevent pain during an operation.

granulocytes

White blood cells that help to protect you against bacterial infection; one type: neutrophils, are also known as "polys," "segs."

growth factors

A naturally occurring protein that causes cells to grow and divide. Too much growth factor production by some cancer cells helps them grow quickly. Other growth factors help normal cells recover from side effects of chemotherapy.

growth hormone replacement therapy (GHRT)

Growth hormone is a chemical made by the pituitary gland in the brain. It controls physical growth in children. GHRT involves giving extra growth hormone to children who lack it, in order to enable them to grow normally.

H

harvest

The removal of a donor's bone marrow prior to bone marrow transplant.

hematologist

A doctor who specializes in diseases of the blood and blood-forming tissues.

hematology

The study of blood and blood forming tissues.

hematology/ oncology

The branch of medical science that treats disorders of the blood, blood forming tissues, and tumor cells.

hemoglobin

The substance in red cells which carries oxygen.

hemorrhage

A general term for loss of blood brought about by injury to the blood vessels or by a deficiency of certain necessary blood elements such as platelets.

hives

Itchy welts on the skin.

Hodgkin's disease

A type of cancer that affects the lymphatic system and arises in a lymph node. Named for the doctor who first identified it.

hospice

A special kind of care for people in the terminal phase of illness, their families, and caregivers.

hormone

A substance made and secreted by a gland and carried in the bloodstream to parts of the body where it has a specific effect on the way the body works.

holistic

Considering the patient as a whole – mind, body, and spirit.

I

iliac crest

The top edge of your hip bone from which marrow is usually taken for diagnosis of blood disorders or to harvest marrow.

immune reaction

A reaction of normal tissues to substances recognized as "foreign," i.e., not self.

immunity

The state of your body's defences against a particular infection or possibly against a certain cancer. The body activates the immune response when it is invaded by bacteria or viruses. Once the body has been exposed to a disease, it remembers it. If the disease should invade again, the immune system can react very quickly and keep the disease at bay.

immunosuppressive

Lowering the body's ability to fight infection.

immunotherapy

Treatments that promote or support your immune system's response to a disease such as cancer.

implantable port

A device that implants a system for delivery of fluids, medicines, or blood directly into a vein. The entire device is surgically implanted under the skin and can be used for an extended period of time.

infection

Invasion of the body by disease producing organisms.

informed consent

A legal document that explains a course of treatment, the risks, benefits, and possible alternatives; the process by which patients agree to treatment. Often parents sign this form, if the child is too young to understand.

infusion

The introduction of a fluid into a vein.

intravenous

Into a vein, for example, when drugs are given directly through a drip.

L**lesion**

A change in body tissue; sometimes used as another word for tumour.

leucopenia

Decrease in the white blood cell count, often a side effect of chemotherapy.

leukemia

Cancer of the blood or blood-forming organs. If you have leukemia, you may have a noticeable increase in white blood cells (leukocytes).

local anesthetic

A medication given by injection into a part of your body to prevent pain in the area without putting you to sleep.

long term survivor

If you are 5 years from the last sign of disease and at least 2 years off therapy.

lumbar puncture

Insertion of a needle into the spinal canal to remove cerebrospinal fluid and/or to give drugs.

lymph

Clear fluid that flows through the lymphatic vessels and contains cells known as lymphocytes. These cells are important in fighting infections and may also have a role in fighting cancer.

lymph nodes/glands

A part of your body important in the defence against infections, commonly known as glands; in leukemia they enlarge when filled with lymphoblasts. They also enlarge in lymphoma.

lymphatic system

The tissues and organs (including lymph nodes, spleen, thymus, and bone marrow) that produce and store lymphocytes (cells that fight infection) and the channels that carry the lymph fluid. The entire lymphatic system is an important part of your body's immune system. Invasive cancers sometimes penetrate your lymphatic vessels (channels) and spread (metastasize) to your lymph nodes.

lymphoma

Cancer of the lymphatic system, a network of thin vessels and nodes throughout the body. Lymphoma involves a type of white blood cells called lymphocytes. The two main types of lymphoma are Hodgkin's lymphoma and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

lymphocytes

White blood cells that fight infection.

M**malignant**

Cancerous. If a tumour is malignant, it grows uncontrollably and can travel to other parts of the body.

meningeal leukemia

When the meninges, the membranes which cover the brain and the spinal cord, become invaded by leukemic cells.

metastases

Tumours that have come from a first (primary) tumour in another part of the body; also know as secondary tumours.

myelosuppression

A reduction in platelets, red cells, and white cells, as a result of decreased bone marrow activity. Platelets are the blood cells that prevent or stop bleeding. White blood cells help prevent infections.

MRI scan (magnetic resonance imaging)

Uses magnetic waves rather than radiation to produce a picture for diagnosis and monitoring treatment.

mucosa

Lining of hollow organs (e.g., mouth, stomach, bladder, etc).

morbidity

The state of being diseased; ill effects.

N**narcotic**

A drug that relieves pain and may make you sleepy.

nausea

The feeling that you may vomit.

neoplasm

An abnormal growth (tumour) that starts from a single altered cell; a neoplasm may be benign or malignant. Cancer is a malignant neoplasm.

neuro

To do with the nerves or nervous system.

neutropenia

Less than the normal number of neutrophils or "polys" in the circulating blood, compromising the immune system rendering the patient susceptible to infection.

neutrophils

White blood cells that fight bacterial infection.

non-Hodgkin's lymphoma

Cancer of the lymphatic system. What distinguishes non-Hodgkin's lymphoma from Hodgkin's lymphoma is the absence of a type of cell called the Reed-Sternberg cell. This cell is present only in Hodgkin's lymphoma.

nuclear medicine scan

A method for localizing diseases of internal organs such as the liver or bone by injecting small amounts of a radioactive substance (isotope) into the bloodstream. The isotope collects in certain organs and a special camera is used to produce an image of the organ and detect areas of disease.

O**oncologist**

A doctor with special training in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. A pediatric oncologist is a doctor who specializes in children with cancer.

oncology

The study of and treatment of cancer.

ophthalmology

The study of the eyes.

osteo

To do with the bones.

P**packed marrow**

Bone marrow filled with tumour cells or blasts.

palliative treatment

Treatment that relieves symptoms, such as pain, but is not expected to cure the disease. The main purpose is to improve the quality of life.

pancytopenia

The decrease of all blood cells (red, white, and platelets).

pathology

The branch of medicine involved in making diagnoses from the examination of tissues.

pediatric

To do with children.

pediatrician

A doctor who specializes in the care and treatment of children.

petechiae

Pin-point purple spots caused by tiny amounts of bleeding into the skin.

platelet

Blood cell which helps to prevent bleeding with clotting.

polys

The group of white cells that is important to your ability to resist bacterial infection. A "poly" count of less than 1,000 indicates less than normal protection, considerable risk of infection, and the inability to fight infection.

pre-op/ post-op

Before surgery/after surgery.

primary

Original site of cancer.

prognosis

The outlook or expected outcome of a disease and its treatment.

prosthesis

An artificial replacement of, for example, a limb or an eye.

protocol

A formal outline or plan, such as a description of what treatments you will receive and exactly when each should be given.

pyrexia

An elevated body temperature.

R**radiation therapy**

The use of specialized x-rays to destroy cancer cells.

radiation oncologist

A doctor who specializes in using radiation therapy to treat cancer.

red blood cells

Blood cells that carry oxygen to the cells throughout your body.

relapse

Reappearance of cancer after a disease-free period. Re-occurrence of a tumour after treatment.

remission

Disappearance (not a cure) of detectable disease. A period of good health when there is no longer any visible cancer.

renal

Pertaining to your kidneys.

S**sarcoma**

A tumour of tissue which connects or supports body organs.

scan

A study using either x-rays, radioactive isotopes, or other imaging to produce images of internal body organs.

sedative

A drug given to make you drowsy or sleepy.

staging

Finding the true extent of disease. This is done in many ways, including surgery and radiology.

stem cells

Primitive (premature) cells in the bone marrow that are important in making red cells, white cells, and platelets.

stomatitis

Mouth sores; can be a side effect of some kinds of chemotherapy.

subcutaneous

Under the skin.

T**thrombocytopenia**

A decrease in the number of platelets in your blood; can be a side effect of chemotherapy.

tissue

A collection of cells similar in structure and function.

toxic

Poisonous; for example, cytotoxic drugs poison cells.

tumour

An abnormal lump of tissue formed by a collection of cells. It may be benign or malignant.

transfusion reaction

An allergic response to blood products. You may experience hives, chills, or headaches.

U**ultrasound scan**

An imaging method in which high-frequency sound waves are used to outline a part of your body. The procedure can be done to any part of the body – the presence, progression, or regression of a tumour or infection can be monitored this way.

urinalysis

The process by which your urine is examined for various factors.

V**vein**

A blood vessel carrying blood which is relatively lacking in oxygen from the tissues towards your heart and lungs. Veins are used to draw blood samples and administer IV fluids because blood in veins is not under pressure.

vertigo

Dizziness, especially the feeling that your surroundings are swirling.

vomit

To eject the contents of your stomach through your mouth.

W**white blood cells**

Cells in your blood that are most important in fighting infection. Examples: neutrophils or "polys," and lymphocytes or "lymphs."

X**X-rays**

One form of imaging to produce an image of the body on film.