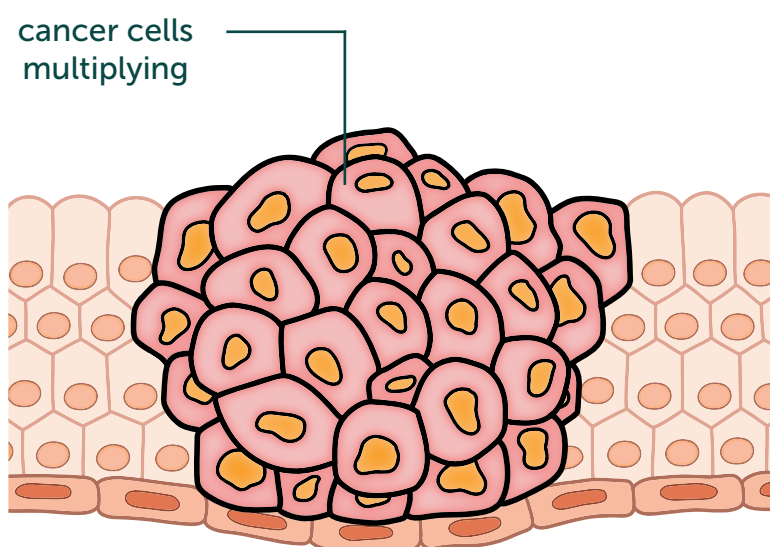


Secondary liver cancer

Often, when people say they have 'liver cancer' they mean they have cancer that has spread to the liver from somewhere else. This is secondary liver cancer. This factsheet explains what that means and how to find the right information.

What is cancer?

Cancer is a condition where body cells become abnormal. The abnormal cells grow and multiply in an uncontrolled way.



The cancer cells continue to grow and eventually form a lump – a tumour. The tumour is able to grow into surrounding areas of normal body tissue.

There are as many different types of cancer as there are types of cells in the body. Where the cancer starts is called the 'primary' cancer.

What is secondary cancer?

Cancers can be life-threatening because their cells can break away from the primary tumour and spread to another part of the body. There are two main ways that they do that.

Via the blood stream

Cells that break away can travel through blood vessels. They can then lodge in another body organ – the liver for example. There, they can start to multiply and grow into a new tumour. This is called a secondary cancer.

Via the lymphatic system

This network of glands and tubes covers the whole body. It circulates fluid that leaks into body tissues back to the bloodstream. As it passes through, the fluid is filtered by lymph glands (also called lymph nodes). Cancer cells that have broken away can get carried in lymph and stuck in the lymph nodes, where they can start to multiply.

Why is this important?

Knowing how a cancer spreads explains why lymph nodes are often checked for cancer cells when you first have treatment. Cells in the lymph nodes show that a primary cancer has started to spread.

If you're looking for information, it's very important to know the type of primary cancer you have. That tells you the type of treatment you need. For example:

- If you have bowel cancer that has spread to your liver, the cells in the liver will be bowel cancer cells.
- Because they are bowel cancer cells, they'll respond best to treatments for bowel cancer, not liver cancer.

Many very common cancers can spread to the liver, including

- bowel cancer
- lung cancer
- breast cancer
- prostate cancer

Where to find information

We are a charity that focuses on liver cancer and liver disease. So we don't have information about other types of cancer. You can find detailed information on all types of cancer from:

Cancer Research UK

Helpline: 0808 800 4040

Web: www.cruk.org

Macmillan Cancer Care

Helpline: 0808 808 0000

Web: www.macmillan.org.uk

There are also specific charities for many types of cancer, for example:

Bowel Cancer UK

Email: nurse@bowelcanceruk.org.uk

Web: bowelcanceruk.org.uk

Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation

Helpline: 0800 358 7200

Web: roycastle.org

Breast Cancer Now

Helpline: 0808 800 6000

Web: breastcancernow.org

Prostate Cancer UK

Helpline: 0800 074 8383

Web: prostatecanceruk.org

If you are looking for a particular type of cancer, google the name of it, plus 'UK' and if there's a particular charity dedicated to it, you'll find it.



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