

## Primary Aspects of Gastrointestinal Cancer

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### Editorial Note

The stomach may be a sac-shaped organ and a crucial part of the gastrointestinal system. The stomach is part of the digestive system and connects the esophagus and the small intestine. After chewing and swallowing, food enters the esophagus, which is the tube that carries food through the throat and chest to the stomach. The esophagus connects to the stomach at the gastroesophageal (GE) junction, which is found slightly below the diaphragm (the thin part of respiratory muscle below the lungs). Then the stomach begins to digest food by secreting gastric juice. Food is mixed with gastric juice and then discharged into the first part of the small intestine, called the duodenum. Some people use the word "stomach" to refer to the abdominal area. The medical term for this area is abdomen. For example, some people that have pain within the area will say they need "stomach pain" when actually the pain may come from other organs within the area. Doctors call this symptom "abdominal pain" because the stomach is just one of the many organs in the abdomen. Stomach cancer is different from other cancers that can occur in the abdomen, such as colon cancer or rectal cancer (intestinal cancer). These cancers may have different symptoms, different outlooks, and different treatments. In gastric cancer (also called stomach cancer), cancer cells usually start from the inner wall of the stomach wall and then penetrate deep into the stomach wall as the cancer develops. Tumors can grow and affect nearby organs, such as the liver and pancreas. Stomach cancer is one of the most common cancers in the world, but it is rare in the United States. In the past few decades, the number of gastric cancer cases has been steadily declining, which may be due to the widespread use of refrigeration that has increased the chance of preservative-free fresh food and bacterial contamination. Stomach cancer occurs when cells in the lining of the stomach grow and divide abnormally. Tumors can originate in any part of the stomach, but most of them originate from the glandular tissue on the inner surface of the stomach. This type of cancer is gastric adenocarcinoma (gastric cancer). Rare types of gastric cancer include small cell carcinoma, lymphoma, neuroendocrine tumors, and gastrointestinal stromal tumors. Stomach cancer is a relatively common cancer in Australia, but the number of diagnoses has been declining. It is rare in people under the age of 50, and it affects men more than women. It is estimated that by 2021, Australia will diagnose 2,392 new cases of gastric cancer. The five-year survival rate for gastric cancer is 31%. Once food enters the stomach, the stomach muscles use a movement

called peristalsis to help mix and grind the food. Stomach cancer can develop in any part of the stomach and can spread to the entire stomach and to other organs, such as the small intestine, lymph nodes, liver, pancreas, and colon. The gastrointestinal (GI) tract is a 25-foot-long passageway that runs from the mouth to the anus. Everything you eat passes through your esophagus and is processed in your stomach and small intestine to extract nutrients.

**Risk Factors:** The main explanation for gastric cancer is genetic mutations (changes) in gastric cells, which cause the cells to grow rapidly and eventually form tumors. Risk factors that may increase the likelihood of gastric cancer include:

- Family history
- A diet that does not include a lot of fruits and vegetables
- Obesity
- High-salt diet
- Smoking

### Treatment

There are several ways to treat stomach cancer. In many cases, surgery can be avoided. In the early stages, when the cancer is confined to the superficial (upper) layer of the stomach, the cancer can be removed by upper endoscopy performed by a gastroenterologist. During this process (endoscopic sub mucosal dissection or ESD), the tumor is removed from the rest of the stomach wall and removed through the mouth. Once the tumor invades the superficial layer of the stomach, it needs to be surgically removed and the esophagus (the tube through which food passes) is connected to the small intestine for digestion. Radiation therapy uses high-energy energy rays to kill cancer cells. Chemotherapy uses chemicals to kill cancer cells. These treatments are usually combined. There are also several drugs for the treatment of gastric cancer. Treatment depends on the severity of the cancer and is determined by the doctor after diagnosis.

### Diet

The best way to prevent stomach cancer is to eat a healthy diet, eat more fruits and vegetables, less salt, and less red meat. Maintain a healthy weight and develop good exercise habits. Avoid smoking because it increases the risk of stomach cancer and many other cancers. People whose diet contains a lot of

pickled foods (such as salted fish, bacon, and pickled vegetables) have an increased risk of stomach cancer. Regular consumption of processed meat, roasted meat, or charcoal meat seems to increase the risk of non-cardiogenic gastric cancer. Eating little or

no fruit may increase the risk of stomach cancer. On the opposite hand, eating more fresh fruits (especially citrus fruits) and raw vegetables seems to scale back the danger of stomach cancer.