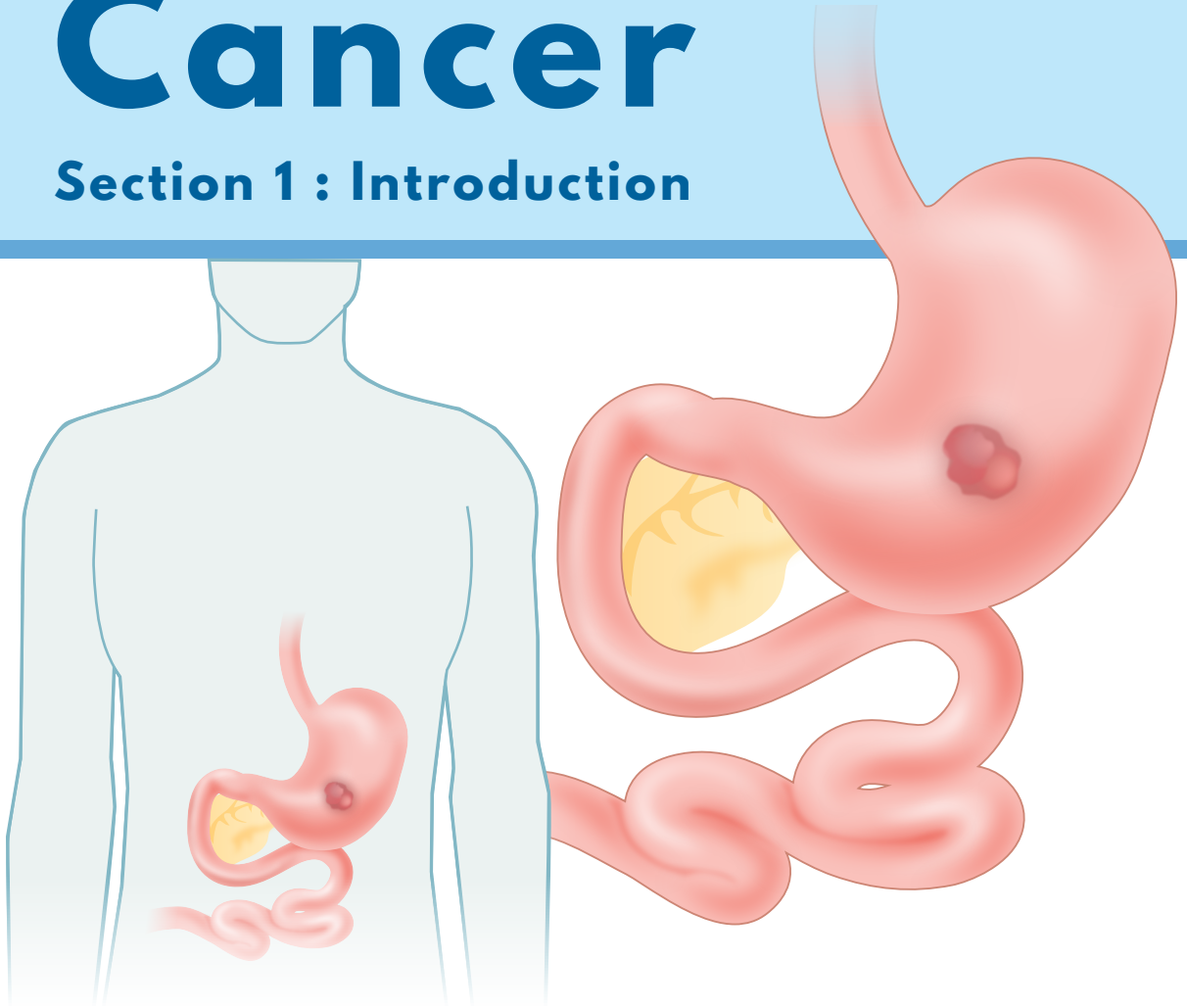


# Stomach Cancer

## Section 1 : Introduction



Centre universitaire  
de santé McGill



McGill University  
Health Centre

Office d'éducation des patients  
Patient Education Office

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## **IMPORTANT**

Information provided by this booklet is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner, or to substitute medical care. Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.



This material is also available through the MUHC Patient Education Office website [www.muhcpatienteducation.ca](http://www.muhcpatienteducation.ca)

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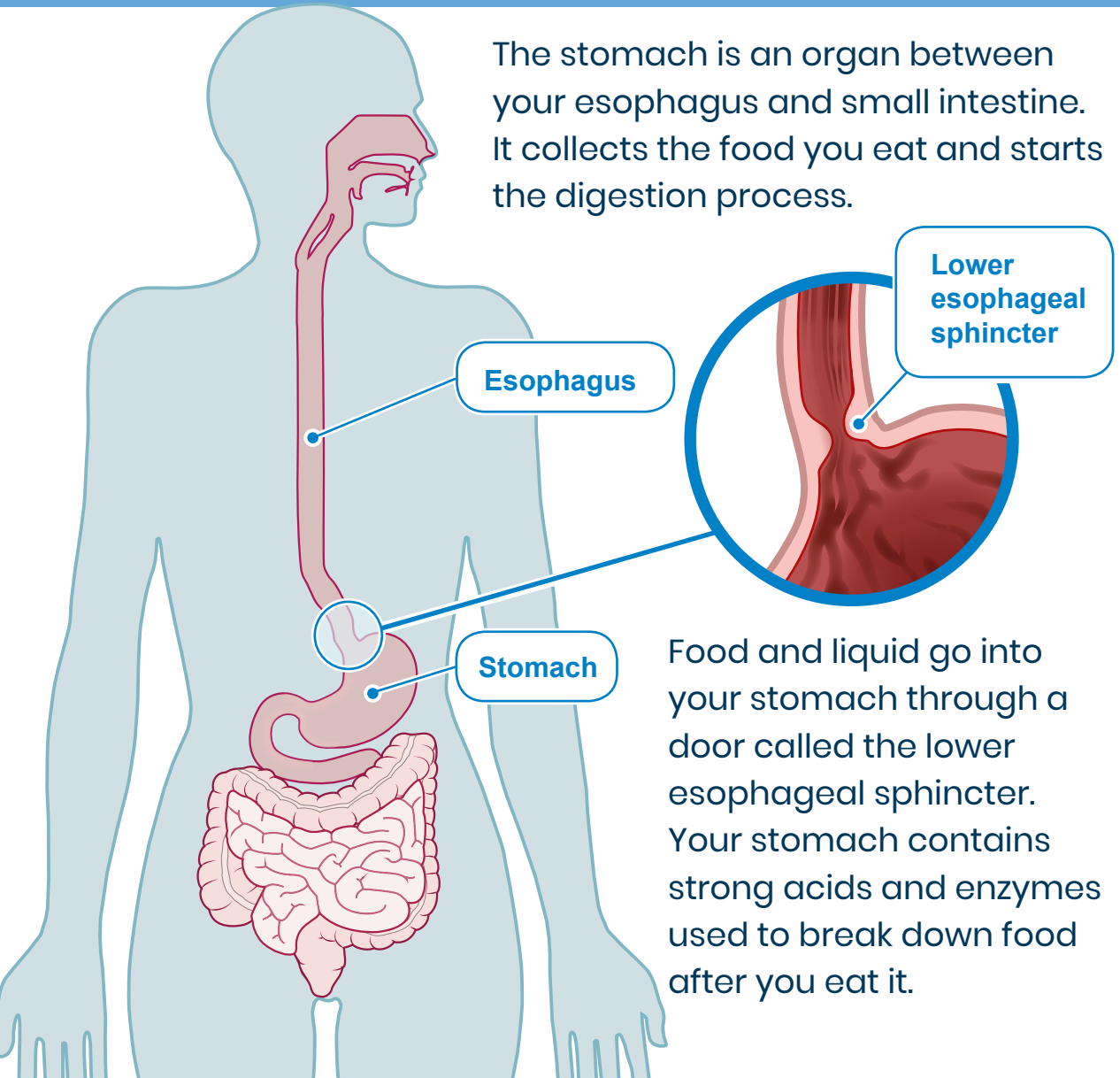
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# What is the stomach?

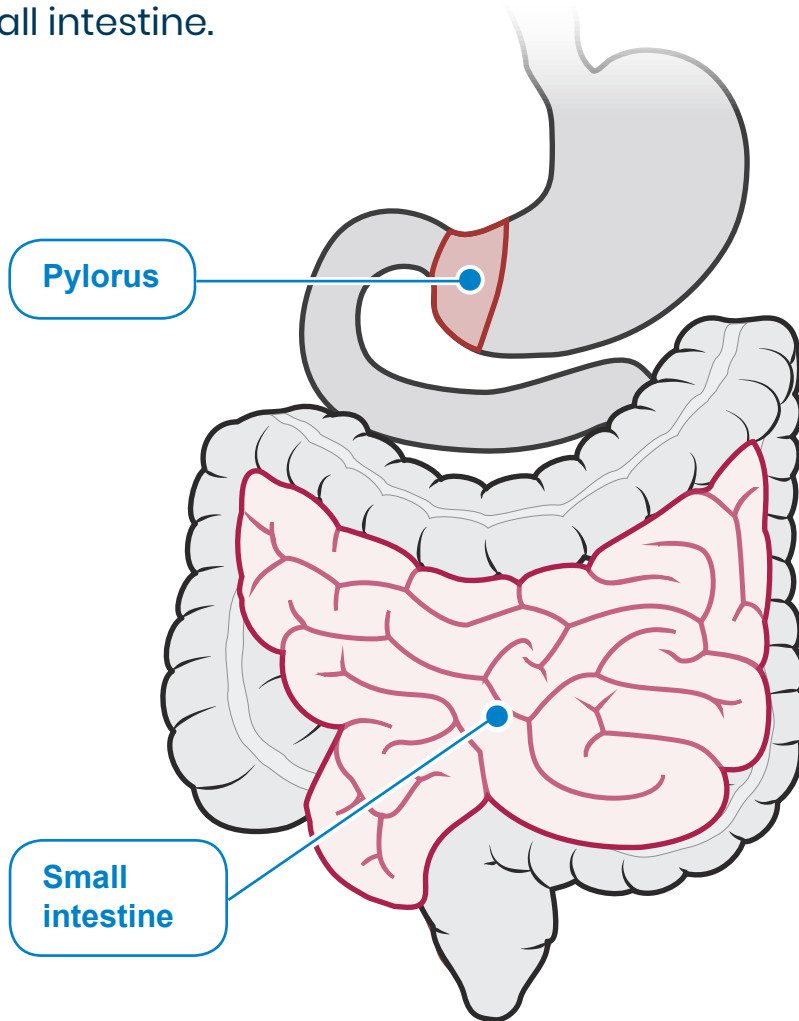
The stomach is an organ between your esophagus and small intestine. It collects the food you eat and starts the digestion process.



Food and liquid go into your stomach through a door called the lower esophageal sphincter. Your stomach contains strong acids and enzymes used to break down food after you eat it.



The stomach contracts to help mix food with stomach acid to break it down. The digested food then leaves the stomach through a valve called the pylorus to enter the small intestine.

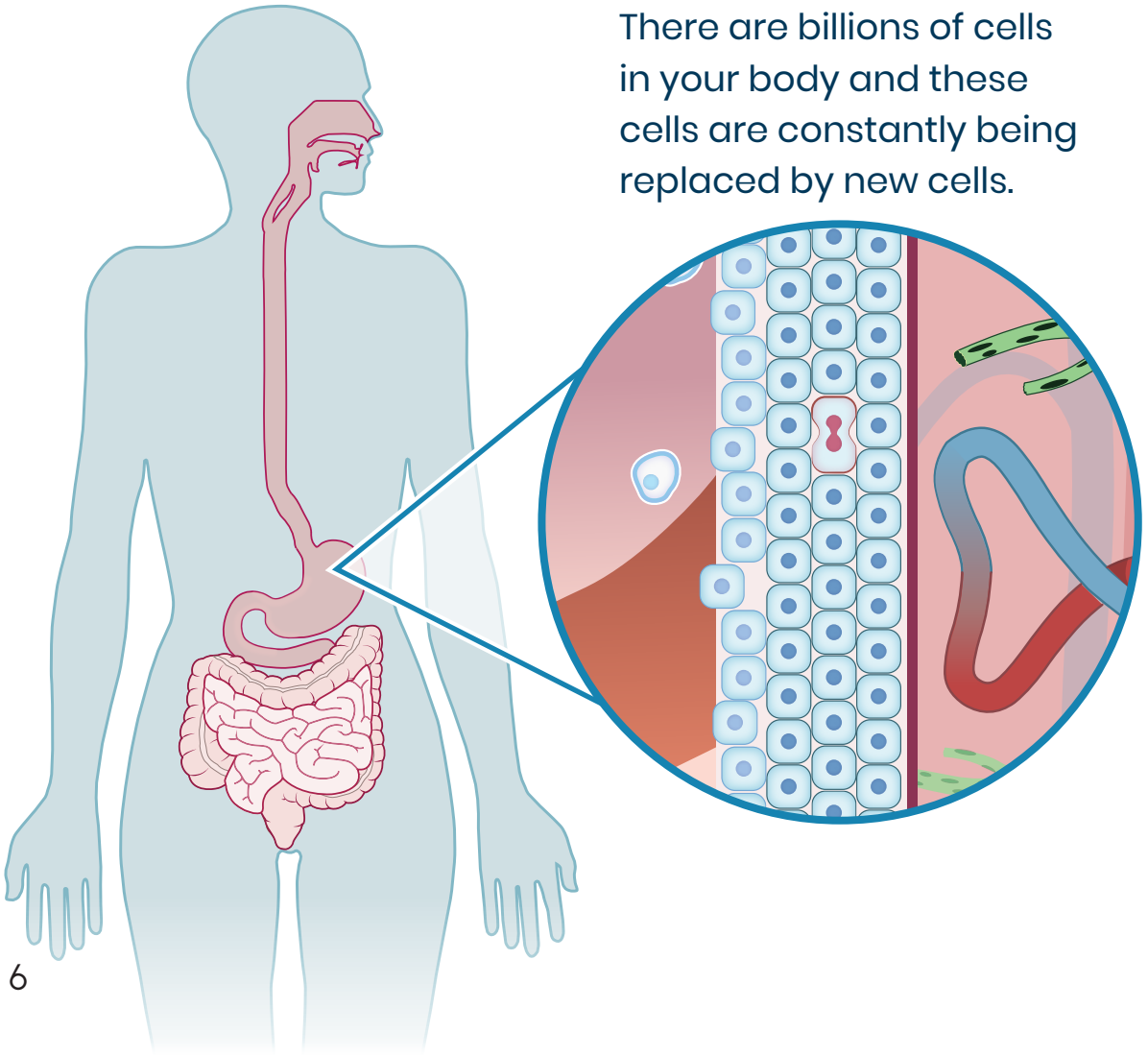


The small intestine helps digest food even more using bile and pancreatic juices. Eventually the digested food is absorbed in the small intestine and the waste is expelled through the colon.

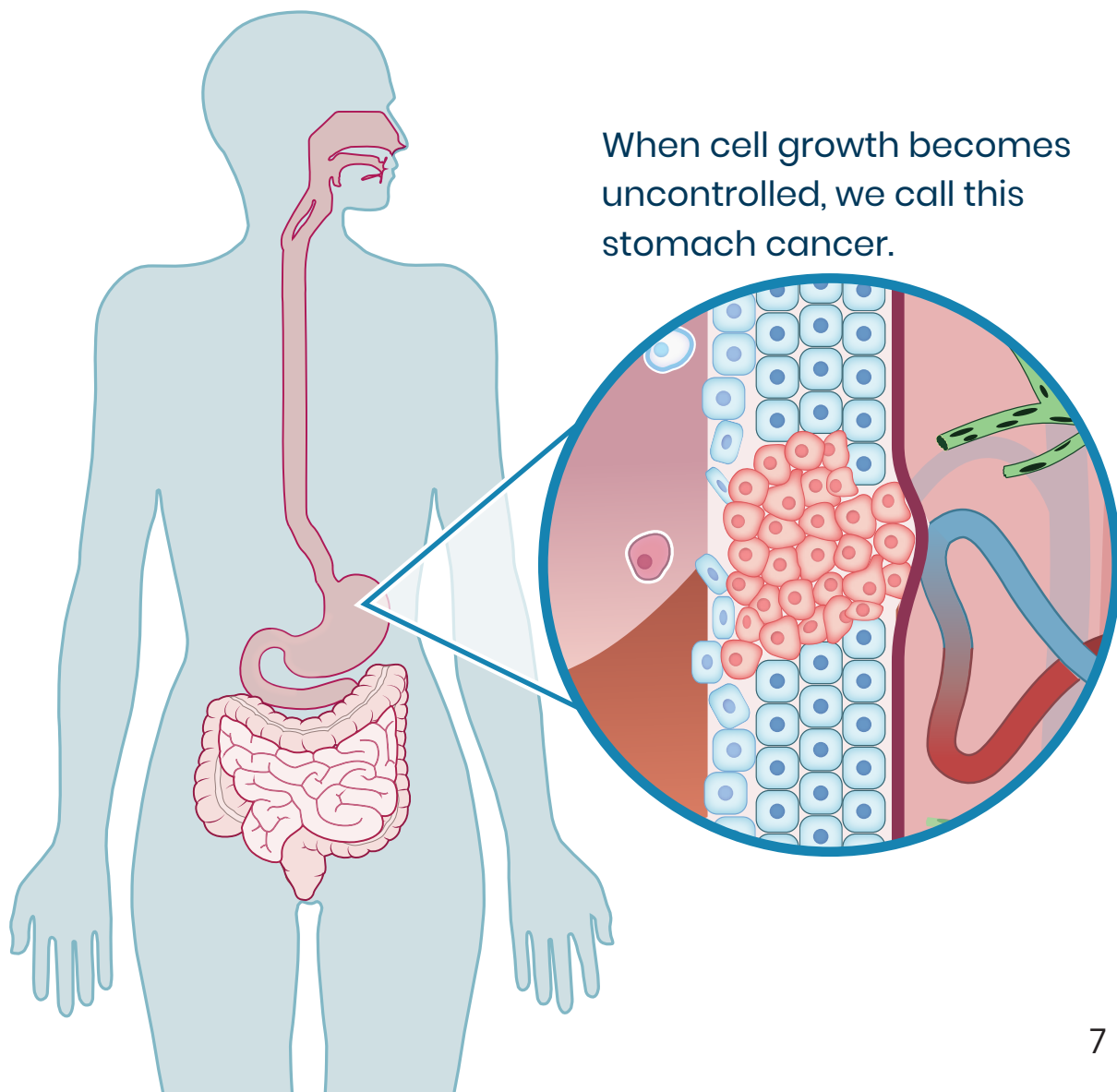
# What is stomach (gastric) cancer?

To better understand stomach cancer, you first need to understand how cells grow in your body.

There are billions of cells in your body and these cells are constantly being replaced by new cells.



Your stomach is lined with several layers of cells. These cells are constantly dividing and forming new cells. The new cells push away the older cells, which are washed away. The growth and repair of these cells occurs in a controlled and orderly way.



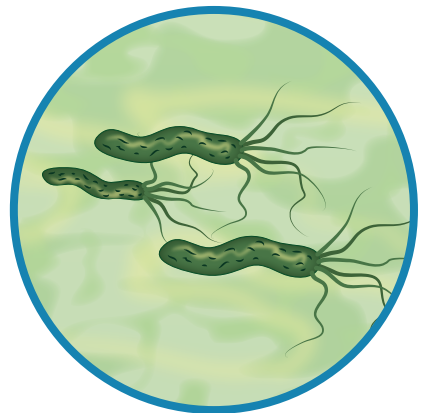
When cell growth becomes uncontrolled, we call this stomach cancer.

# What causes stomach cancer?

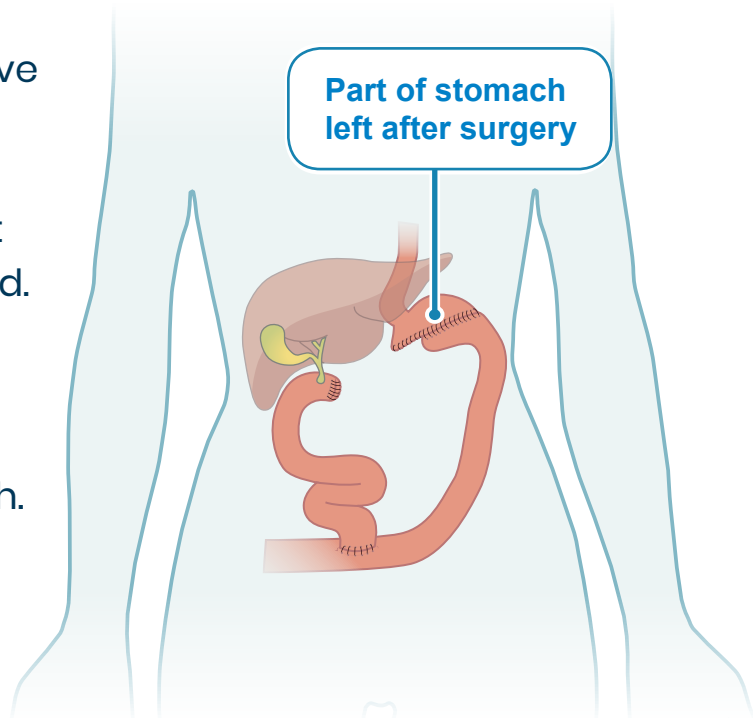
Many times stomach cancer happens randomly with no known cause. Stomach cancer is rare, but more common in patients over the age of 50 and in men. Nobody knows why men are more likely to get stomach cancer than women.



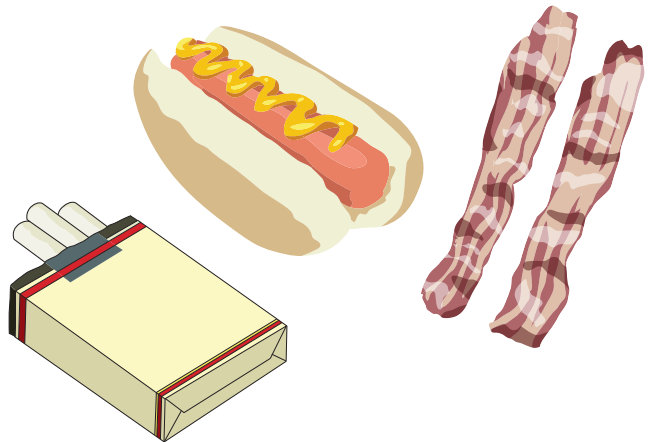
A common bacteria called *H. pylori* lives in the stomach. *H. pylori* often causes few if any symptoms. People with stomach cancer are more likely to have *H. pylori* infections, but still most people with *H. pylori* never develop stomach cancer.



Previous surgery to remove part of the stomach (such as for ulcers) can lead to cancer in the part of the stomach left behind. This may be because of changes in stomach acid or because of bile refluxing into the stomach. These cancers usually take many, many years to develop.



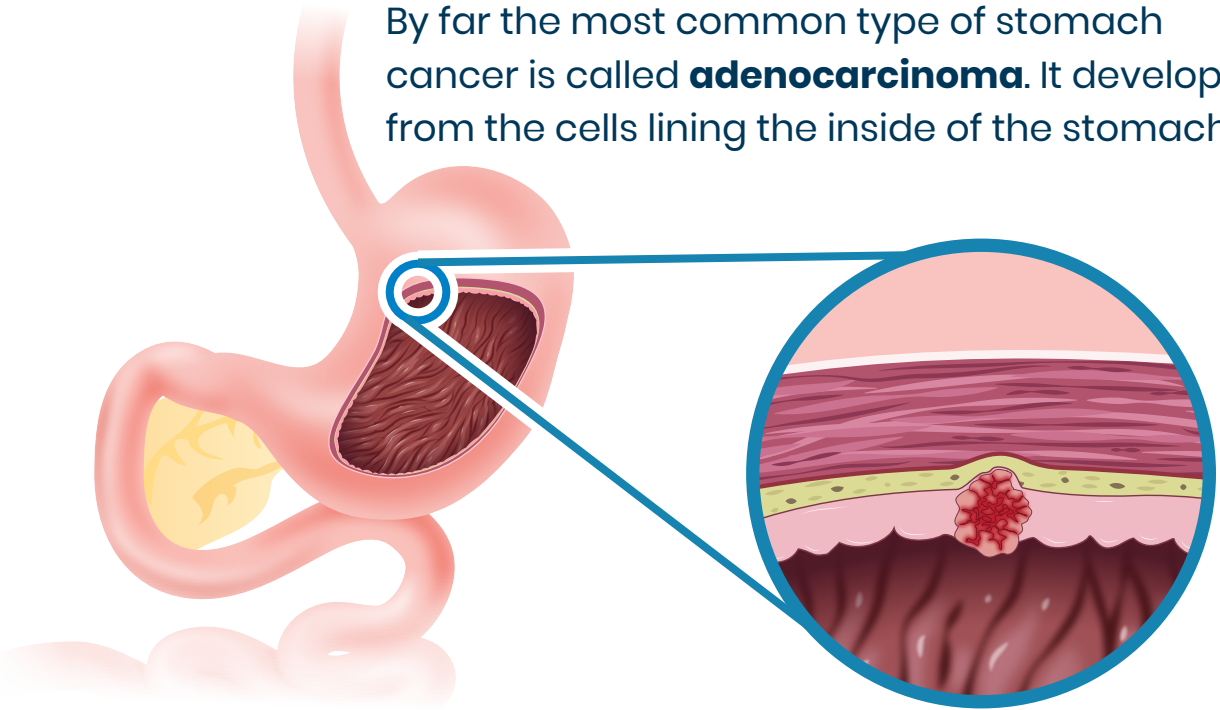
Certain lifestyle factors have been associated with stomach cancer. Eating preserved meats and other foods high in nitrites, smoking, and being overweight are risks for developing stomach cancer.



Some stomach cancers run in families and are genetic. These often develop at very young ages.

# What types of stomach cancer are there?

By far the most common type of stomach cancer is called **adenocarcinoma**. It develops from the cells lining the inside of the stomach.



Other types of stomach cancer include lymphoma, gastrointestinal stromal tumour, and carcinoid tumours. These are all very rare.

Different types of stomach cancer are treated in different ways. This is because they grow from different types of cells.

**This booklet will focus on treatments for the most common type of stomach cancer (adenocarcinoma).**

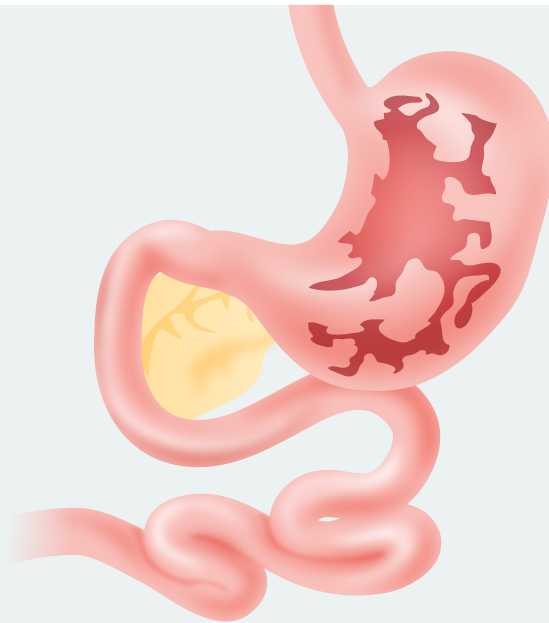
# Where can stomach cancer occur?

Stomach cancer can occur in all parts of the stomach. In North America, cancer in the upper stomach is becoming the most common location for cancer to occur.

Stomach cancer usually starts off very small. Over time, the cancer can grow into a large mass.

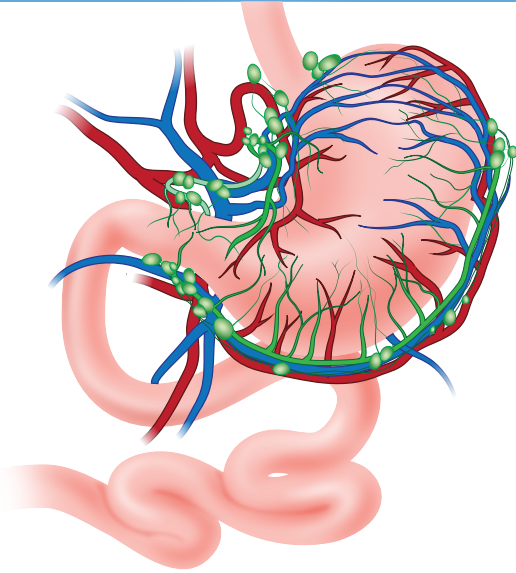


One type of adenocarcinoma is called linitus plastica. This type grows underneath the inner lining of the stomach and can spread very far. Linitus plastica is very aggressive and can often take over the entire stomach.



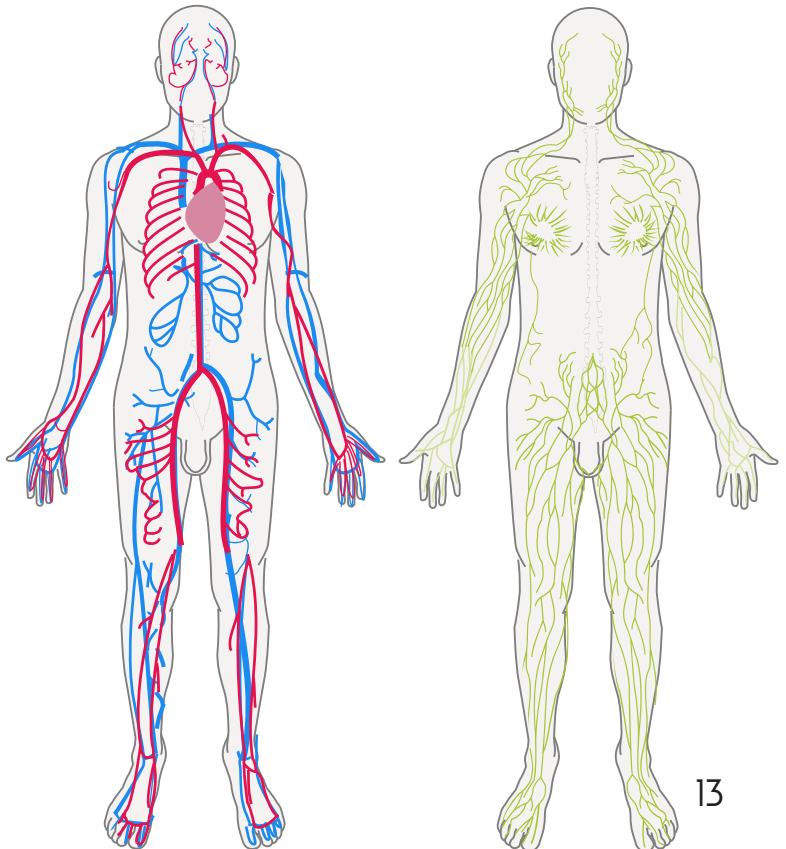


# How does cancer spread?



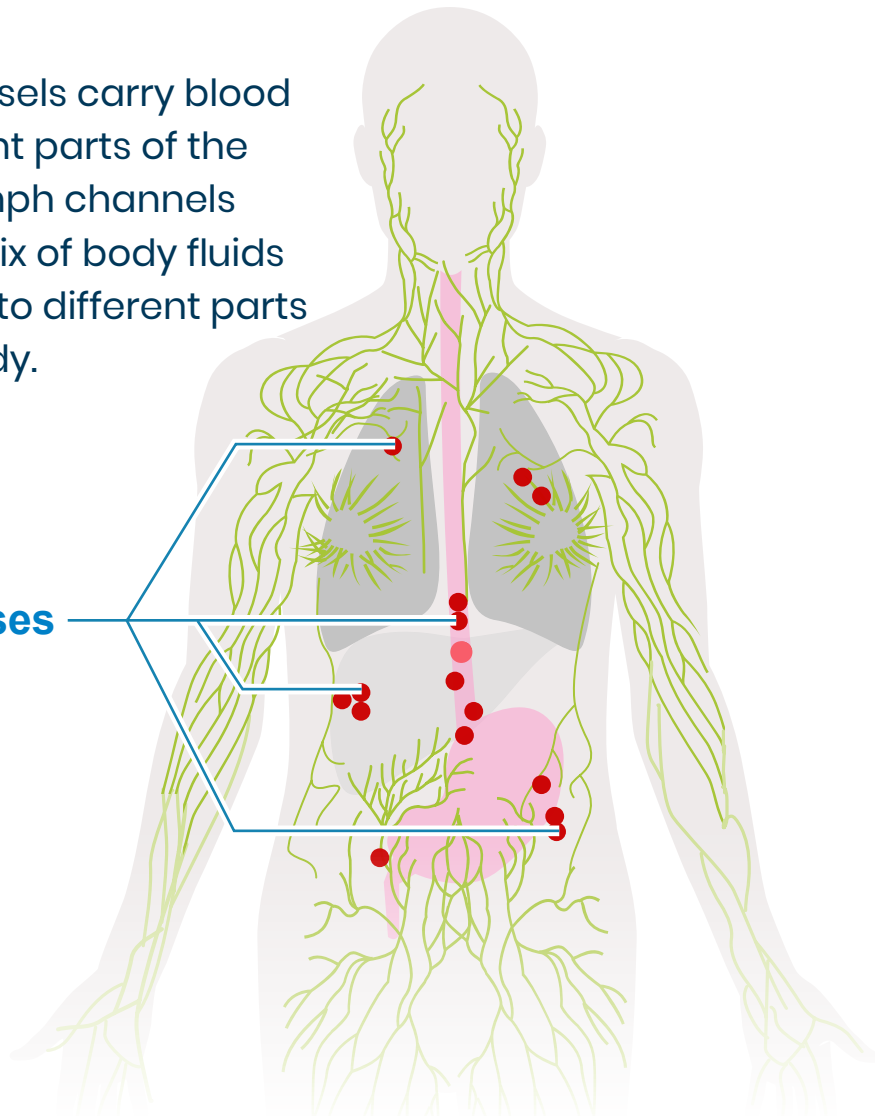
Cancer cells can access blood vessels and lymphatic channels within the walls of the stomach and spread to other organs.

The cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body through networks of tubes such as lymph channels and blood vessels.



Blood vessels carry blood to different parts of the body. Lymph channels carry a mix of body fluids and cells to different parts of the body.

## Metastases



When cancer cells use these channels to move to distant places, they can settle and continue to grow. These new growths, called metastases, are the same stomach cancer growing in another part of your body. For stomach cancer, this happens most often in the lymph nodes, liver, and lining of the abdomen.

# What is cancer staging?

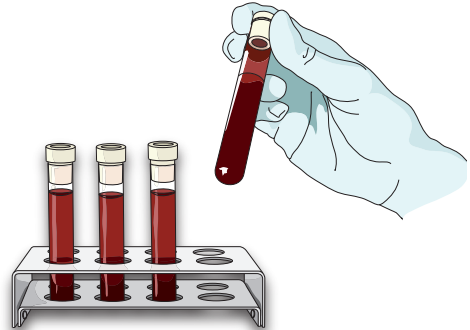
Your doctor may talk to you about cancer staging. Staging describes how advanced, or far along, the cancer cells have grown. Knowing the stage of cancer helps your doctors plan your care.

**Several methods may be used to help stage gastric cancer, such as:**

## 1. Physical exam

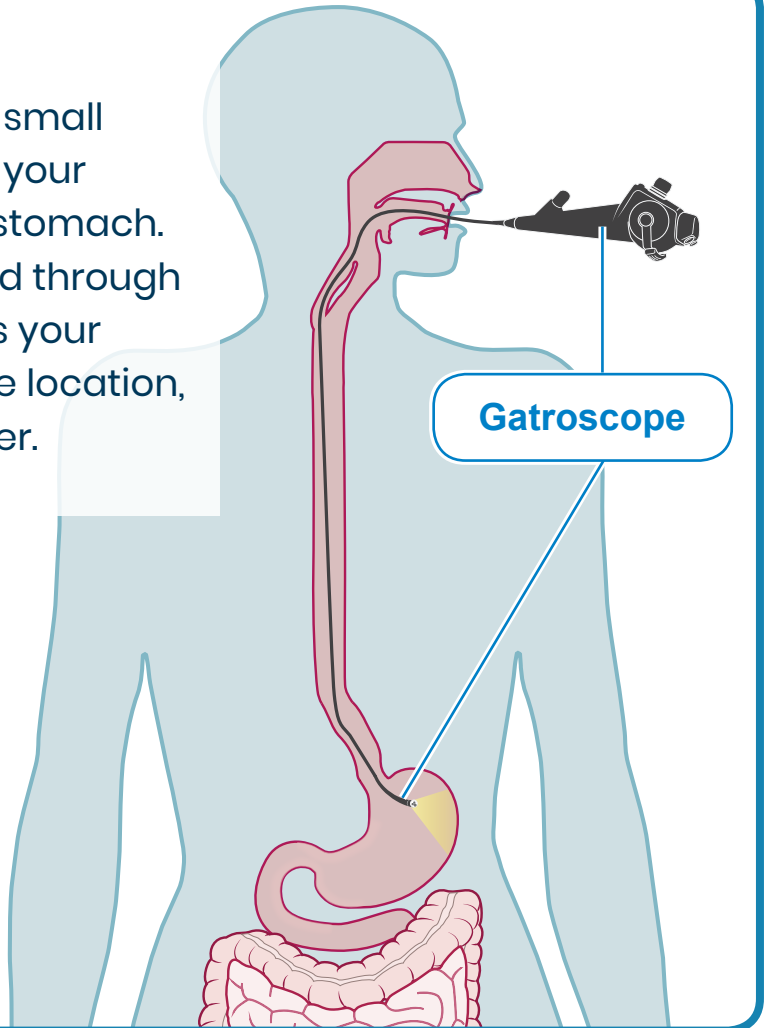


## 2. Blood tests



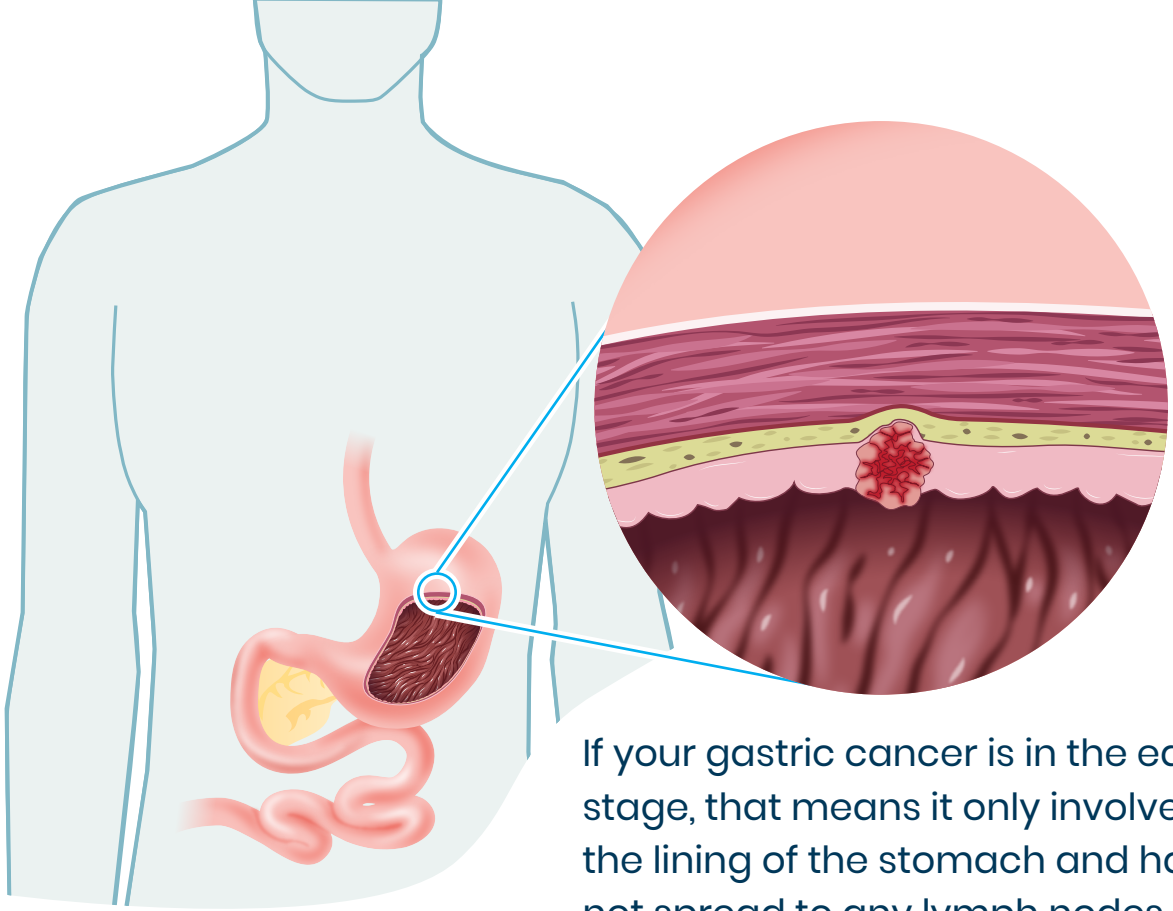
### 3. Gastroscopy

Your doctor will use a small camera to look down your esophagus into your stomach. The camera is inserted through your mouth and helps your doctors determine the location, size and type of cancer.



Your doctor may also ask for other tests to better understand your cancer and see if it has spread. You may need a CT scan, PET scan, ultrasound or other x-rays.

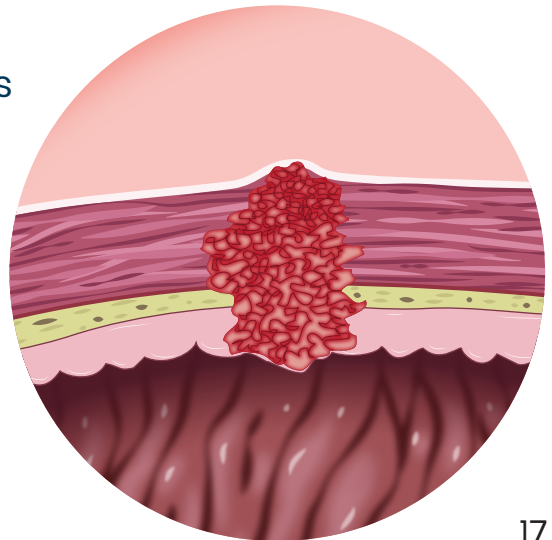
The tests help to tell how advanced the cancer has become and guides the choice of treatment.



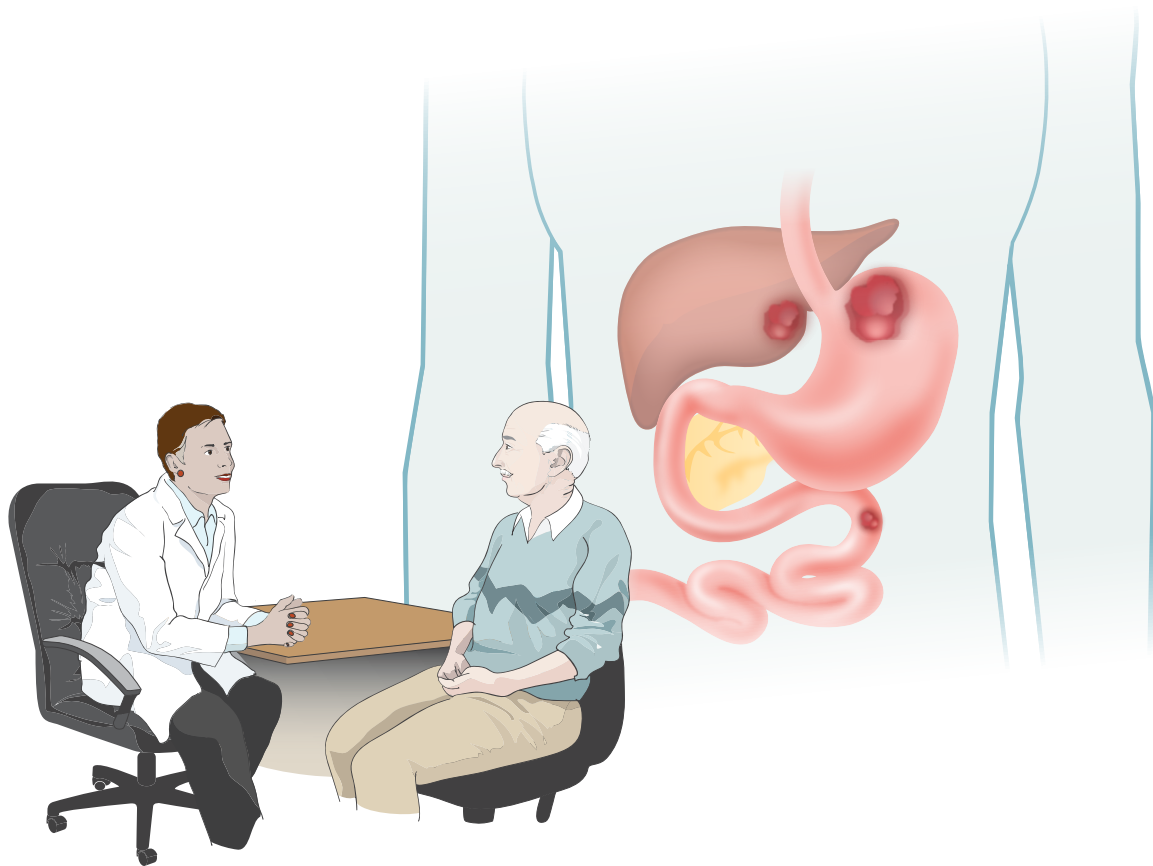
If your gastric cancer is in the early stage, that means it only involves the lining of the stomach and has not spread to any lymph nodes.

If your cancer is locally advanced, that means it involves most or all of the layers of the stomach and/or has spread to the lymph nodes nearby.

When the cancer grows very deep, it may invade other organs around the stomach, including the spleen, liver, pancreas or colon.



If your cancer is in the advanced stage, that means it has spread to other parts of the body, usually the liver or lining of the abdomen.



Cancer staging is an important part of making a prognosis, or predicting what will happen with your cancer in the future. Different treatments are chosen for different stages. Your doctor will speak to you about what this means in your case.

# Notes and Questions

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