

# Colon cancer

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You have heard a lot of information about colon cancer and treatment. We often use words and talk about things that are new to you. This handout answers common questions that are often asked by our patients and families.

## **What type of cancer do I have?**

You have colon cancer. Sometimes it is called colorectal cancer or bowel cancer.

## **What does primary tumour mean?**

This means where the cancer started. With colon cancer, the primary tumour starts in the colon. Sometimes, the cancer spreads to the lungs or liver. Even though it has spread to these areas, it is still colon cancer. It does not mean that you have liver or lung cancer. Liver and lung cancer are different than colon cancer.

## **What does metastatic mean?**

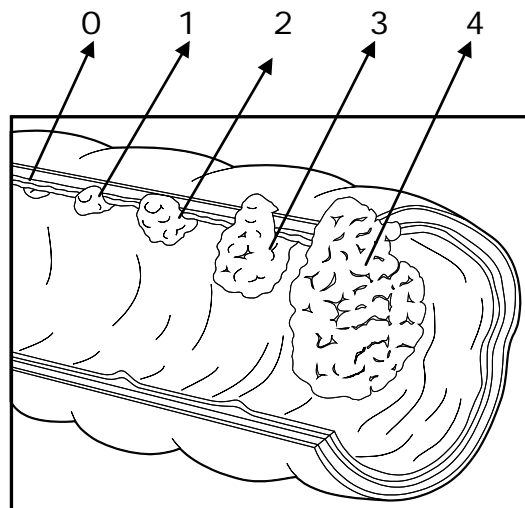
This means that the cancer has spread to other parts of the body.



## What does the stage of cancer mean?

The stage of cancer tells us how much of the cancer is in your body. Knowing the stage helps us plan your treatment. You have:

<input type="checkbox"/> Stage 0	Cancer cells on the inside surface of the colon, rectum or polyp.
<input type="checkbox"/> Stage 1	Cancer cells on the surface or just into the colon. No cancer cells in the muscle layers.
<input type="checkbox"/> Stage 2	Cancer cells are through the muscle layers of the colon or rectum. No cancer cells in the lymph nodes.
<input type="checkbox"/> Stage 3	Cancer cells are in the lymph nodes. The cancer may or may not have grown through the colon wall.
<input type="checkbox"/> Stage 4	Cancer cells have spread to other body parts such as the liver or lungs.



## What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy (chemo) is using drugs to kill cancer cells. You will receive your chemotherapy at the JCC in the Chemo Suite on Level 2. You do not need to stay overnight.

Before you start on chemo there is a chemo teaching class that we want you to attend. During the class you will learn more about chemotherapy, how it is given and how to take care of yourself. You may be nervous about the side effects of chemo such as nausea (feeling sick to your stomach). There are very good drugs to help prevent nausea and other side effects.

You may hear the word adjuvant chemotherapy. Adjuvant means in addition to or plus. Your main treatment was surgery to remove the cancer. In addition to surgery you need chemotherapy. This is called adjuvant chemotherapy.

You will be given information about the type of chemotherapy you will need.

## What does a chemotherapy cycle mean?

Chemo is given over a period of time. This time period is called a chemotherapy cycle. A cycle is when chemo starts, stops, and then starts again. If you are taking pills the cycle is every 3 weeks. This means you take pills for 2 weeks and then 1 week with no pills, and then start again with the pills.

## How am I given my chemotherapy?

You will either get your chemo in a pill or injected into a vein (IV). Most IV chemo is given in a vein in your upper arm through a long tube called a PICC. PICC stands for **P**eripherally **I**nserted **C**entral **C**atheter. The PICC stays in your arm throughout your treatment. Blood for lab tests can also be taken out through a PICC. This decreases IV sticks.

A visiting nurse will change your PICC dressing and teach you more about PICC care. Home care is arranged through the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integrated Network, HNHB LHIN (formerly CCAC).

## What does “check your counts” mean?

This is a blood test. When we say counts, we are talking about your white blood cells and red blood cells. White blood cells (WBC) fight infection. Red blood cells (RBC) carry oxygen.

Chemo can decrease the amounts of WBC and RBC you have. We check your counts before each chemotherapy cycle. We do this to make sure that you have enough WBC and RBC.

## What other services for support are available to me?

We have many supportive care services here at the JCC. These include:

- social work
- dietitian
- aboriginal navigator
- chaplain
- pain and symptom management

Resources include:

- Patient and Family Resource Centre in the lobby of the Cancer Centre.
- [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)
- [www.colorectal-cancer.ca](http://www.colorectal-cancer.ca)
- [www.ostomyhamilton.com](http://www.ostomyhamilton.com)

We are here to help you and your family during this stressful time. Please share your concerns with us so that we can help you find the supports and resources you need.

## Safety when driving if you have an ostomy

Always wear your seatbelt. If you find this difficult, it may be helpful to use a small pillow or padding over the ostomy before applying your seatbelt. We also encourage you to speak with your ostomy nurse and review the information package you were provided from the Hamilton Ostomy Association ([www.ostomyhamilton.com](http://www.ostomyhamilton.com)). There are a number of products posted on line that you may find helpful to cushion the ostomy.

## Your plan

The type of chemotherapy you will receive is called \_\_\_\_\_.

You will be given information sheets about this medication.