

A Guide for Patients and Families

Strong Against Cancer

Your Guide to Cancer Care

What is Cancer?

Cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the body. These abnormal cells may form a mass of tissue called a tumour.

Benign tumours are non-cancerous.

- Usually not life-threatening.
- Do not spread to the rest of the body.
- Can sometimes cause problems, especially when they grow too big.

Malignant tumours are cancerous.

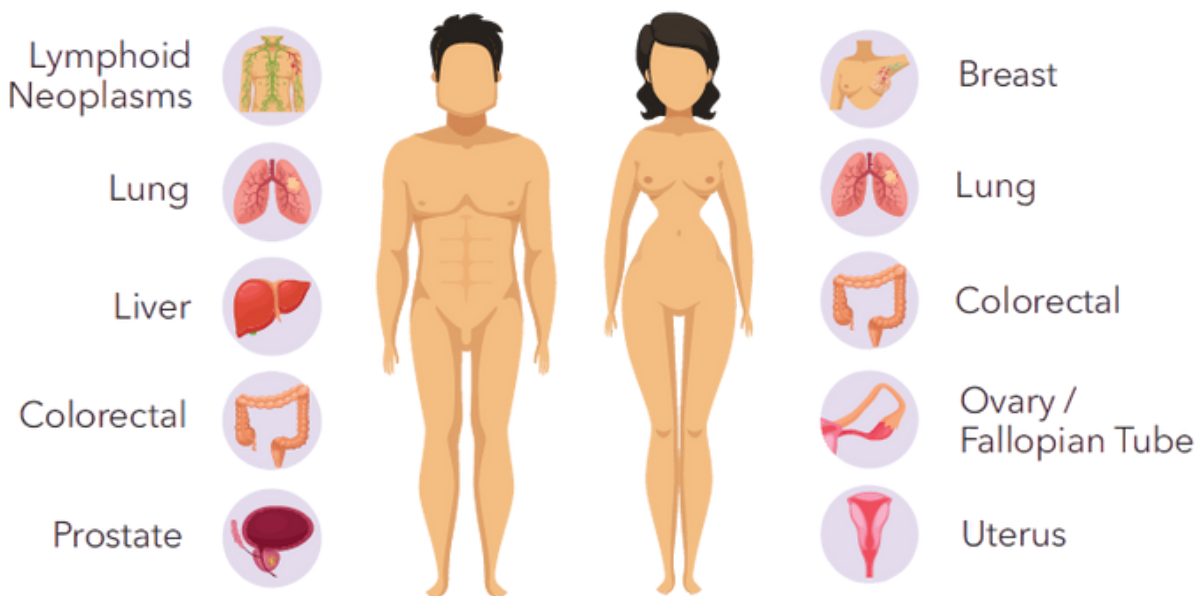
- Can grow and spread to other areas of the body via a process called metastasis.



Common Types of Cancer:

Cancer can occur in different parts of the body.

The top five cancers for males and females in Singapore are:



Source: Singapore Cancer Registry, 50th Anniversary Monograph 1968 - 2017 (2013 - 2017 mortality data)

Causes and Risk Factors:

There is no single cause of cancer, and many patients do not have a known cause. However, some known causes include:



Early Detection of Cancer

Early detection of cancer allows treatment to be taken before it spreads to other parts of the body. Possible indications include, but are not limited to:



Growing **lump**



Sore or ulcer that does not heal properly



Changes in size, shape or colour of a **mole** on the skin



Abnormal bleeding

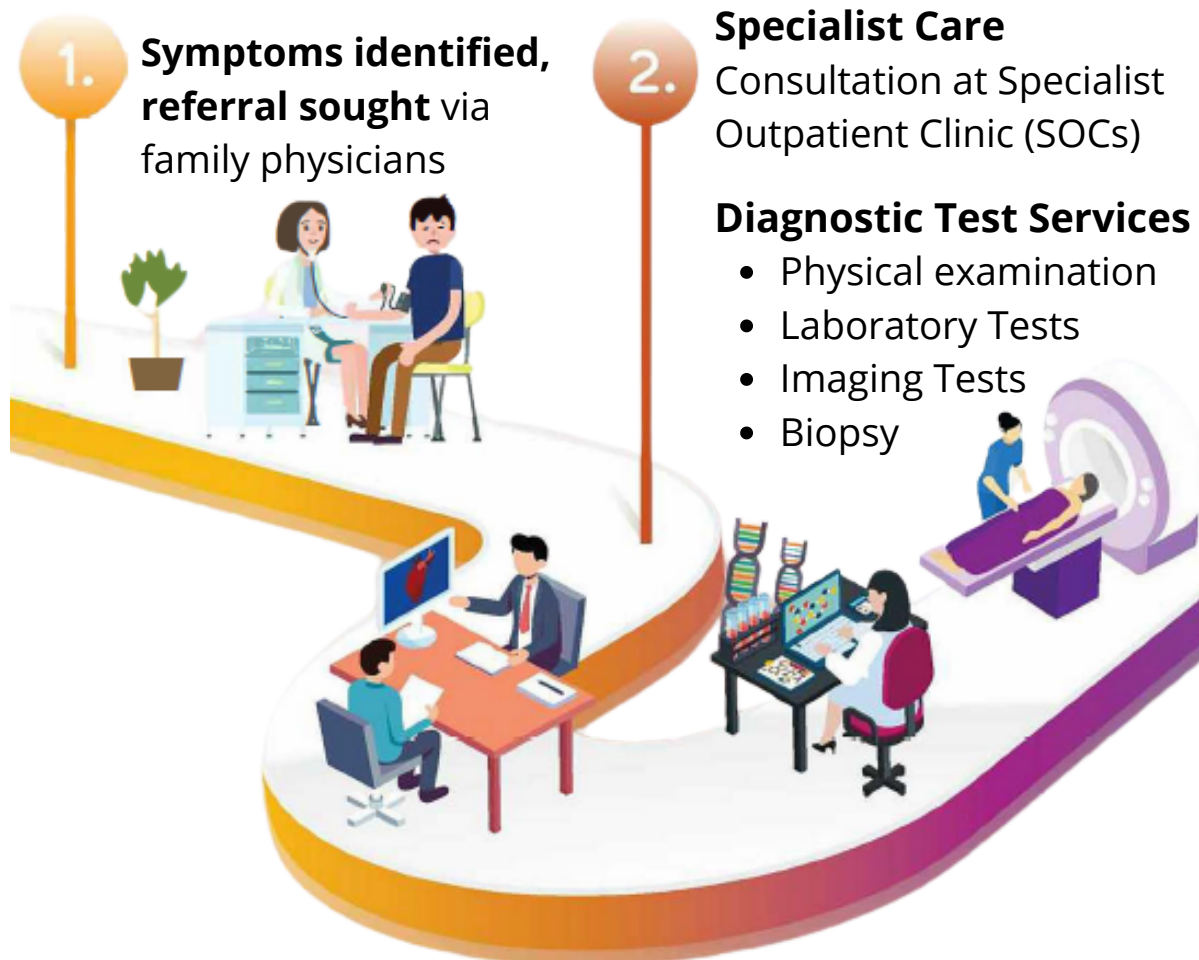


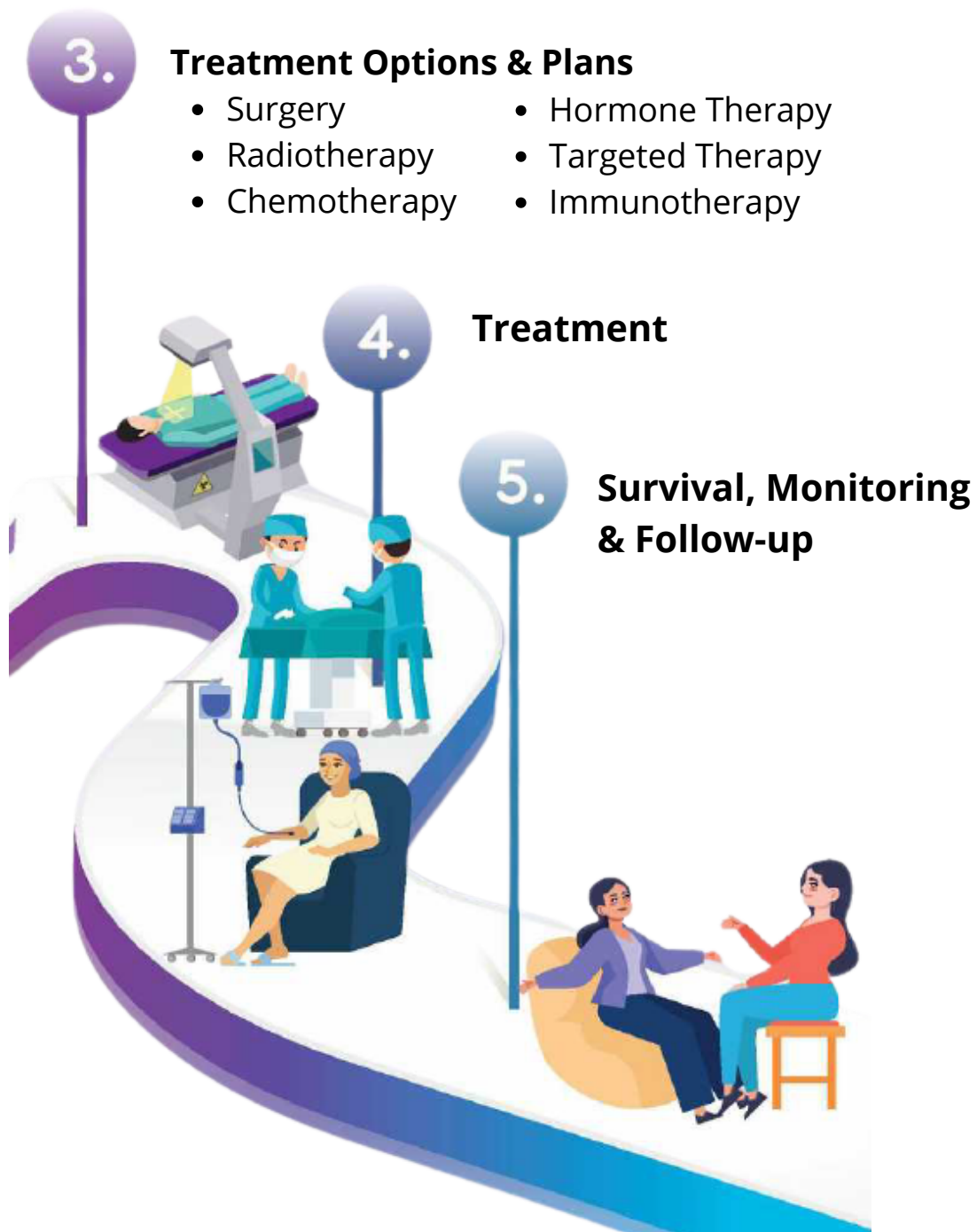
Conditions that **do not go away or get better**, such as persistent cough, hoarseness of voice, loss of weight without reason, changes in bowel habits etc.



Be alert of any major changes that you experience. Seek medical attention immediately if the condition persists for a long time.

A Typical Patient Cancer Care Journey





Palliative Care:

During and/or after treatment, patients may receive palliative care to help improve quality of life by:

- Managing cancer symptom (chemotherapy or radiotherapy may also help).
- Receiving psychological and emotional support.

What are the treatment options available?

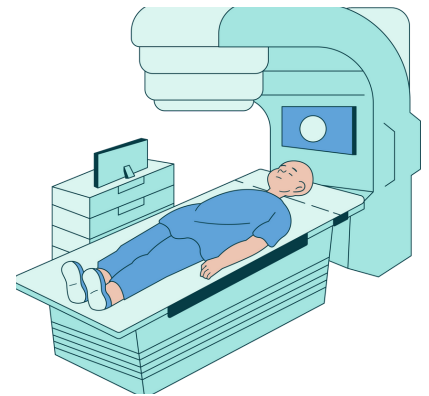
Surgery

Often the first type of treatment used to remove the tumour. Depending on your condition, your surgeon may remove the entire tumour or only part of it. After the surgery, you may require a combination of other treatment options to treat the remaining tumour.



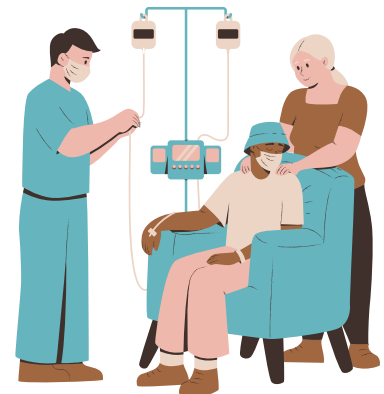
Radiotherapy

Use of high-energy rays to destroy cancer cells by damaging their DNA to prevent or slow the spread of the tumour. It can be administered alone or combined with other types of treatment, such as surgery, chemotherapy or both.



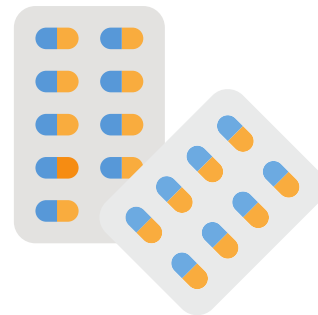
Chemotherapy

Use of potent drugs to destroy cancer cells. It can be administered through intravenous infusion or injection to destroy rapidly growing cancer cells and control their spread.



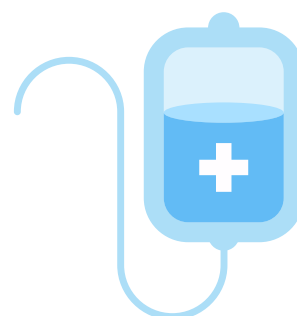
Hormone Therapy

Use of medication to deprive the cancer cells of the specific hormones in the body that encourage them to grow. This can slow or even stop the growth of the tumour. Such medications can be given as tablets, capsules or liquids for oral consumption.



Targeted Therapy

Use of drugs to target specific genes and proteins involved in the growth and survival of cancer cells. This prevents the cancer cells from spreading and growing further.



Immunotherapy

Helps the immune system fight cancer by improving or restoring the function of the immune system. It can be administered via intravenous injection, oral medications or intravesicle administration.



Coping with Side Effects

- Depending on your response, a variety of side effects may surface during your treatment.
- Common side effects include nausea and vomiting, fatigue, loss of appetite, hair loss etc.
- If you need guidance in managing the side effects of your cancer treatment, speak to your cancer team looking after you.
- Inform your doctor if you notice any new or changes in your symptoms.

Multidisciplinary Approach to Cancer Care

A **multidisciplinary team** made up of Doctors, Nurses and Allied Health Professionals work closely towards the common goal of providing **optimal care and support** for cancer patients. This includes a range of **cancer-related supportive services** such as cancer rehabilitation, palliative care and pain management to help patients cope better, whilst maintaining a good quality of life.

Supporting you through - Standing Strong Against Cancer

Medical Oncologists, Haematologists & Radiation Oncologists specialise in prescribing drug therapies, such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy to treat cancer.



Surgeons specialise in performing surgeries to remove cancer.



Radiologists & Pathologists specialise in diagnosing diseases by using medical imaging (radiology) procedures and examining tissue samples respectively.



Nurses support overall cancer care management, including patient assessment, treatment administration and monitoring for side effects.





Dietitians, Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech Therapists etc. optimise patients' recovery through tailored plans.



Pharmacists make recommendations for treatment plans and manage the risks associated with medications.



Medical Social Workers provide psychosocial, financial and counselling support to patients and their families.



Patient Service Associates handle administrative duties such as registration, appointment scheduling, payment and financial counselling.

What To Expect During Hospital Visits

Your first visit with a doctor

During your first visit, your doctor will provide you with information to help you better understand your diagnosis and treatment options. Your doctor will discuss with you about your care plans and treatment goals to make an informed decision. Bring a family member or friend along to assist you in making a decision.

In some instances, your doctor may perform some physical examinations and other diagnostic tests (e.g. radiology imaging or blood tests) to determine the stage of the cancer. The diagnostic test results will help your doctor in prescribing a suitable treatment.



During your initial consultation, your doctor may discuss the following with you:

- The **type** of cancer that you have
- The **stage** of your cancer
- The **treatment options** available
- **Major side effects** of your treatment options
- Referral to Medical Social Workers for **supportive counselling** and additional **financial support**.

Your Subsequent Visits

During your cancer treatment, you will need to periodically see your doctor to review your treatment plan and progression. In order to assess your response to the treatment, your doctor may ask you to go for further diagnostic tests.



During your subsequent consultations, your doctor may discuss the following with you:

- How you are doing in relation to your treatment goal
- How you can manage your treatment **side effects** (if any)
- Referral to other **supportive care services** (e.g. dietitians, physiotherapists etc.) to better manage your condition (if required).



Cancer Care Initiatives & Programmes

Multidisciplinary & Integrated Cancer Care Initiatives

Cancer management can be complex and vary for individuals. Depending on your needs and condition, your doctor may refer you to the respective services.



Genetic Counselling Clinic

Assesses a person's risk for an inherited cancer syndrome, and the best therapy suitable for a person's gene profile.



Geriatric Oncology Supportive Clinic

Optimises cancer care by detecting and managing frailty in older patients. Includes holistic assessment and supportive care while they undergo treatment.



Cancer Rehabilitation Services

Manage functional impairment due to cancer or cancer-related treatment, such as fatigue, dietary or weight issues, sexual health, psychosocial health etc.



Survivorship Clinic

Cancer survivorship covers the physical, psychosocial and economic aspects of cancer beyond the diagnosis and treatment stages, and will involve both patients and their family members.

Patient Education Programmes

Being diagnosed with cancer can be an emotional journey for both yourself and your loved ones. Your participation in patient education programmes can be useful in helping you to cope and manage your condition.

Speak to your cancer care team to find out more about the various patient education programmes available.



Journeying With Cancer

A series of talks on living with cancer, nutrition, side effects of chemotherapy and more.



ARTiculate

A programme which allows for the creative expression of feelings to with your illness through art work.



Look Good Feel Better

Teaches women undergoing cancer treatment about overcoming treatment-related side effects, looking good and managing their recovery with greater confidence and self esteem.

Patient Support Resources

Patient Support Groups and Other Resources

Besides patient education programmes, there are also patient support groups available. These allow patients to provide support for each other by sharing their experiences through gatherings and various activities.



Patient Support Groups

You may want to check with your healthcare providers for referral to appropriate patient support group. If you require support from our medical social services, do inform your healthcare providers.



Online Resources



Website:

www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg

Tel: 1800 727 3333

Maintaining an Active & Positive Lifestyle



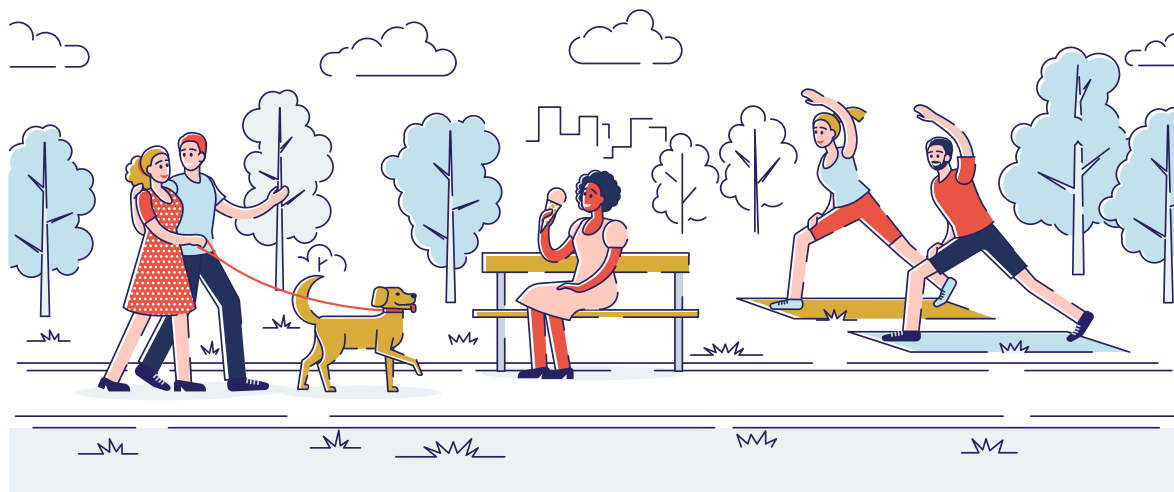
Exercise

- Staying active during your care journey can be beneficial.
- Exercising helps to boost your muscle strength, flexibility and mental outlook, reducing your fatigue levels whilst improving your overall quality of life.
- Start off slowly with simple routines and do not overexert yourself.



Diet

- Adequate nutrition is important during the treatment and recovery phases.
- Maintaining a healthy weight helps to support your immune system to fight against the cancer cells.
- Stick to a healthy, balanced diet that includes healthy fats, lean protein, fruits, vegetables and grains. Stay well-hydrated.
- Your doctor may refer you to a dietitian for more advice.



Financing Your Cancer Treatment

Treatment cost is one of the common concerns that patients face following a cancer diagnosis. Besides worrying about your health, you may also be concerned about your financial status and how to finance your cancer treatment.



Medisave

It can be used to pay for cancer treatment, including hospitalisation, day surgeries and part of outpatient expenses.



MediShield Life

It is a basic health insurance plan which can help to pay for large hospital bills and costly outpatient treatments such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy.



Medifund

For low income families, Medifund can help patients who face financial difficulties in financing their medical bill. Enquire your doctors, medical social workers or clinic staff for more details.

The clinic staff will conduct a comprehensive financial counselling session with you. During the session, you will be informed about the cost of your cancer treatment and advised on the various financial schemes available to tide you through your cancer journey.



Pioneer & Merdeka Generation



Pioneer and Merdeka seniors are entitled to additional reduction on outstanding outpatient bills after subsidies.

Community Health Assistance Scheme (CHAS)



CHAS card holders can receive subsidies for medical care and treatment. The subsidies available varies accordingly for each CHAS category.

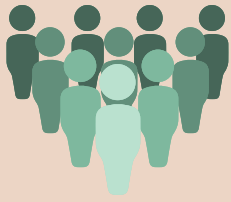
Private Medical Insurance



Some private medical insurance plans may be used to cover cancer treatment. Check your policy with your insurance agent to find out more.

Frequently Asked Questions

How common is cancer?



- In Singapore, about 1 in 4 people may develop cancer in their lifetime.

Source: Singapore Cancer Registry, 50th Anniversary Monograph 1968 - 2017 (2013 - 2017 mortality data)

Is cancer contagious?



- Cancer is not contagious and you cannot catch it from someone who has it.

Can cancer be cured?



- With the advancement in medicine and technology, there are various treatment options available to manage the cancer condition.
- Early detection can increase the chances of a successful treatment, achieve an optimal outcome and even possible cure.
- In some instances, the cancer can be under control for a long time with the use of oral medication, much like hypertension and diabetes.

What is remission?



- Remission is a period of time when the cancer is responding to treatment or is under control.
- Remission can last from weeks to years, or can be permanent.

Can I work while receiving treatment for cancer?



- This depends on the nature of the work that you do. Light work such as administrative duties is allowed. However, it depends on how you feel during the course of treatment.
- Medical leave may be prescribed by your doctor to facilitate rest and recovery. Speak to your doctor so that they can advise you accordingly.

Can I travel while receiving treatment for cancer?



- Travelling is not recommended during chemotherapy due to the high risk of infection. However, if it is necessary, inform your doctor so that they can advise and plan your treatment appropriately.

Acknowledgement
Joint Oncology INnovations Taskforce (JOINT)