

# Cancer (and metastases)



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# Cancer (and metastases)

The term 'cancer' refers to a group of diseases in which abnormal cells divide and spread in a chaotic way. Usually these abnormal cells form a mass, also called a tumour. There are more than 100 different types of cancer. Each type of cancer is a different disease with its own treatment.

## Where is cancer?

You can get cancer anywhere in the body. It can be in the bones or in the blood, skin, brain or colon, and many more areas. We name the type of cancer after the part of the body where the faulty cell division started. If that is in the colon for example then it is called: colon cancer. If it's in the skin, it's skin cancer. But sometimes cancer cells leave the area where they started, and then 'take up residence' somewhere else in the body, which is called metastases.

# Benign and malignant

There are benign and malignant tumours. We only refer to cancer when there are malignant tumours.

- Benign growths do not grow through other tissues and they do not spread throughout the body. An example of a benign tumour is a fibroid in the uterus or a wart. This kind of tumour can press against surrounding tissues or organs, which might be a reason to remove it.
- The cells of malignant tumours behave very differently. This is because the genes that control the cells have been damaged. A malignant tumour can grow in surrounding tissues and organs and can spread.

## What are metastases?

This means that one or more cancer cells detach from the tumour and start 'wandering' through the body. Elsewhere, because of that one cancer cell, a tumour forms. The cancer cells wander through channels in the body. Tumour cells can therefore also reach all kinds of other parts of the body via these channels, for example via blood vessels. This is how cancer spreads, as it is called, and if it does, the cancer is much more difficult to treat. For example, surgery is more difficult if cancer is in many different parts of the body. The chance of dying from cancer is therefore greater if there are metastases.

# Symptoms

Metastases can cause symptoms. Symptoms depend on the location of the metastasis and its extent. In the beginning, metastases usually cause little or no symptoms. When metastases grow, they often press on or grow into surrounding tissue. This can cause symptoms. Examples of symptoms:

- Bone metastases can cause pain or fractures
- Extensive liver metastases can cause enlargement of the liver, nausea, loss of appetite, yellow skin and itching
- Lung metastases can block the airways, causing breathlessness or pneumonia
- Metastases that grow from the abdominal cavity into the bladder can cause blood in the urine
- The passage of the colon can eventually be blocked by metastases in the abdomen.
- Extensive metastatic cancer can also cause fatigue.
- It is usually impossible to predict whether you will develop symptoms

# Treatment

Whether metastases can be treated depends on:

- The original type of cancer
- The extent and location of the metastases
- Your physical condition

The specialist will discuss with you whether treatment is useful and desirable. In most situations, the treatment of metastases is aimed at pushing back the disease and/or reducing symptoms. For many people, the quality of their life is most important to them in that situation. Therefore, be well informed about the advantages and disadvantages of a treatment. For example, you can ask about the expected result, side effects and possible consequences of the treatment. And what happens if you don't do anything? It is also important to know what you have to do for the treatment. For example, whether you will have to go to hospital frequently. Then you can make the best choice for yourself.



## Questions

If you have any questions about the Cancer (and metastases) brochure, you can contact the oncology nurse on working days during office hours on telephone number: 7800493.

For further detailed information about cancer and metastases



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