

TREATMENT UPDATE ON THYROID CANCER

A diagnosis of thyroid cancer can leave you and your loved ones feeling uncertain, anxious and overwhelmed. There are important treatment decisions to make, emotional concerns to manage, and insurance and financial paperwork to organize, among other practical concerns.

It is helpful to keep in mind that there are many sources of information and support for people coping with thyroid cancer. By learning about this diagnosis and its treatment options, communicating with your health care team, and surrounding yourself with a support network, you will be better able to manage thyroid cancer and experience a better quality of life.



WHAT IS THYROID CANCER?

Thyroid cancer begins in the thyroid gland, which is located in the front of the neck. Thyroid cancer starts when the cells in the thyroid begin to change and grow uncontrollably, forming a tumor (also called a nodule), which can be either cancerous or benign. Ninety percent of all thyroid nodules are benign.

There are four main types of thyroid cancer:

Papillary thyroid cancer and follicular thyroid cancer.

These two types of cancer make up about 90% of thyroid cancers. These types grow slowly and are very often curable, especially when found early and in people younger than 45.

Medullary thyroid cancer (MTC).

This type accounts for about 5% of thyroid cancers. It can often be controlled if it is diagnosed and treated before it spreads to other parts of the body.

Anaplastic thyroid cancer.

This is a rare type, accounting for about 2% of thyroid cancers. This type of cancer grows very quickly, so it can be more difficult to treat successfully.

HOW IS THYROID CANCER TREATED?

Treatment options for thyroid cancer are highly effective.

While thyroid cancer can have a high rate of reoccurrence, these reoccurrences are highly treatable with surgery or radioactive iodine.

The primary treatment for thyroid cancer is surgery, aimed at removing half or all of the thyroid and any surrounding lymph nodes where the cancer has spread. Without the thyroid gland, the body stops producing thyroid hormone, which is essential to a body's functioning. Since the body cannot

function without thyroid hormone, patients who are treated with surgery often need to start taking hormone replacement, usually in the form of a daily pill. Additional treatment for thyroid cancer usually consists of radioactive iodine, also taken as a pill.

In cases where radioactive iodine is not effective, a targeted therapy called sorafenib (Nexavar) has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for later-stage or recurrent thyroid cancer. Another targeted therapy is lenvatinib (Lenvima), used in treating papillary and follicular thyroid cancers. For MTC, two other FDA-approved targeted therapy options are vandetanib tablets (Caprelsa, zd6474) and cabozantinib (Cometriq, XL184). In rare cases, your doctor may prescribe chemotherapy or external radiation.

Advances in technology have allowed doctors to find smaller thyroid tumors, some of which are cancerous and some of which are not. Your health care team will work with you to explore whether or not to surgically remove very small tumors that have not yet spread beyond the thyroid. If your doctor finds one of these tumors, he or she may recommend a “watch and wait” approach.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CLINICAL TRIALS IN THYROID CANCER TREATMENT?

Clinical trials help doctors better understand cancer and ways to reduce its symptoms and treatment side effects. People in clinical trials are among the first to receive new treatments. They are also closely monitored by doctors and other researchers.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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Clinical trials for thyroid cancer usually focus on patients with advanced cancer that cannot be treated with surgery or radioactive iodine. To learn more about clinical trials, speak with your doctor.

You can also find listings of clinical trials through resources such as the National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Information Service (800-4-CANCER or www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials) or the American Cancer Society’s Clinical Trials Matching Service (800-303-5691 or <https://clinicaltrials.gov>).

HOW CAN SUPPORT GROUPS HELP WITH A THYROID CANCER DIAGNOSIS?

Adjusting to and finding ways to cope with a thyroid cancer diagnosis is an important part of healing, along with treatment. Joining a support group can help you connect with others going through similar situations and help ease feelings of isolation. Cancer affects the whole person and their loved ones, so it’s important to create a support network as part of managing your care.

CancerCare offers support groups in-person, online and over the phone for patients, caregivers, loved ones and the bereaved. All of our support groups are led by oncology social workers who understand how cancer affects a person and his or her support network, and can provide help to patients and their family.

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