



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## TERMS TO KNOW: SCREENING AND DIAGNOSIS

A cancer diagnosis turns a person's world upside down. This fact sheet defines various cancer-related terms.

### TERMS

**Anti-inflammatory:** Reduces swelling, discomfort and inflammation.

**Asymptomatic:** Not showing or feeling symptoms of a disease.

**Benign:** Not cancerous; won't metastasize or invade local tissues. Can still have detrimental effects to one's health if left untreated.

**Biomarker:** A molecule found in blood, bodily fluids or tissue. Used to help diagnose cancer, give prognoses and predict an individual's response to treatment. Also known as a biological marker.

**Biopsy:** A procedure performed by a surgeon to collect sample cells or tissues for analysis.

**Cancer:** An abnormal growth of cells in which the cells grow and divide uncontrollably.

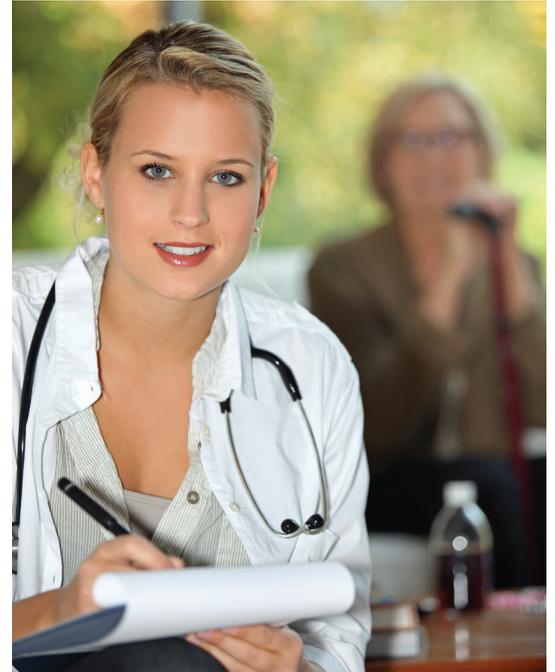
**Carcinoma:** Cancers that originate in the epithelial cells of organs.

**Colonoscopy:** A procedure in which a doctor inserts a thin tube into the rectum to examine the colon and screen for cancer.

**Computed tomography (CAT/CT) scan:** A form of imaging more detailed than an X-ray that allows physicians to see inside the body, locate a tumor and see any changes occurring.

**Etiology:** The cause of an illness or disease.

**Localized:** Used in reference to a tumor that has not spread.



**Lump:** A mass located inside the body that can be benign or malignant.

**Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI):** A form of digital imaging that uses a magnet and radio waves to see what is occurring inside the body.

**Malignant:** Cancerous and can be dangerous if left untreated.

**Mammogram:** An X-ray of the breast and the most important screening test for breast cancer. It can detect breast cancer before the tumor can be seen or felt by you or your doctor.

**Medical oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating cancers. They manage cancer treatment and coordinate with the treatment team, which includes the oncology nurse and social worker.

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**Metastasize:** To spread to other locations in the body. This occurs through the bloodstream or lymph system.

**Oncology nurse:** A health care professional who cares for a person with cancer by providing bedside care, preparing and administering treatments, providing supportive care and educating the person with cancer and their family about their diagnosis, treatments and side effects.

**Oncology social worker:** Professionals who counsel people affected by cancer, including caregivers and loved ones, and help them access practical assistance. CancerCare's oncology social workers are available to help face-to-face, online or on the telephone, free of charge.

**Positron emission tomography (PET) scan:** A form of imaging that incorporates a special dye, given orally or intravenously, that contains radioactive tracers. Used to track cancer treatment and progression.

### **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 case management, 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 master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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**Prostate exam:** A test in which the doctor inserts a lubricated, gloved finger into the rectum and feels the surface of the prostate for any lumps, swelling or other abnormalities. Also called a digital rectal exam.

**Staging:** A classification that explains the extent of the cancer. Usually dependent on if and where the cancer has spread within the body.

**Tumor markers:** Substances produced by cancer cells or by normal cells in response to cancer cells. They are found by analyzing a sample of tumor tissue or body fluid and can help detect and diagnose cancer.

**X-ray:** A form of imaging that uses electromagnetic waves to see inside the body and detect tumors.

*Edited by Danielle Saff, LMSW*

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