



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Uncontrolled growth of malignant cells in the liver. Liver cancer may be primarily resulting from abnormal liver or bile-duct cells, or it may result from spread of cancer from another site (metastases). The most common sources are cancers of the rectum, colon, lung, breast, pancreas, esophagus or skin (malignant melanoma). Liver cancer can affect all ages, but is most common in men over 60.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Loss of appetite and weight loss.
- Tender mass in the right upper abdomen.
- Pain in the upper abdomen.
- Low fever, usually less than 101° F (38.3° C).
- Yellow eyes and skin (sometimes).
- Swollen abdomen from fluid retention (sometimes).
- Lethargy.

### CAUSES

Unknown. It occurs most often in population groups with a high incidence of viral hepatitis and other chronic liver diseases.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Primary liver disease, such as cirrhosis of the liver.
- Use of anabolic steroids.
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Previous hepatitis B infection.
- Chronic use of oral contraceptives.
- Hemochromatosis.
- Metabolic disorders.
- Gallstones, choledochal cysts, clonorchiasis (infection with a liver fluke commonly found in the Far East).

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Hepatitis B vaccination and prevention education for high-risk individuals.
- Cancer screening and early diagnosis for high-risk individuals (laboratory test called alpha-fetoprotein or AFP).

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- This condition is currently considered incurable and fatal within a short time. However, pain can be controlled. Treatment is usually attempted, although it is not likely to be successful.
- Scientific research into causes and treatment continues, so there is hope for increasingly effective treatment and cure.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Sodium retention, leading to life-threatening fluid accumulation in the abdomen and lower body parts.
- Kidney failure.
- Death from loss of liver function.
- Spread of cancer to other organs.



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- A variety of diagnostic tests may be used to confirm diagnosis including blood studies, liver biopsy, X-ray, ultrasound, CT scan, MRI, arteriography, angiography, and radioactive studies.
- Patient care should involve comprehensive supportive care and emotional support.
- Anticancer drugs and radiation therapy are often used. They may afford some relief, but won't cure (palliative).
- Surgery to remove the tumor may be recommended, depending on type and spread of the disease.
- Liver transplant may be considered for some patients.
- Additional information available from the American Cancer Society, local branch listed in the telephone directory, or call (800) ACS-2345. Another source is the Cancer Information Clearinghouse at (800) 4-CANCER.

### MEDICATIONS

- Anticancer drugs may help slow the progress of the disease.
- Pain relievers.
- Antibiotics if the underlying liver condition is infectious.

### ACTIVITY

- No restrictions. Stay as active as your strength allows.
- Hospice care, as an outpatient or inpatient, may be recommended as disease progresses.

### DIET

High-calories, low-protein diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of liver cancer, especially unexplained weight loss, low fever or a mass in the abdomen.
- You develop a swollen abdomen during treatment.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.