

Treating Advanced Bladder Cancer

A quick guide

Contents

This is a brief summary of our information 'Treating advanced bladder cancer' from our website. You will find more detailed information on there. In this information there are sections on

- Bladder cancer staging
- What is advanced bladder cancer?
- Outlook and stats
- Treatment types
- Follow up
- What to ask your doctor

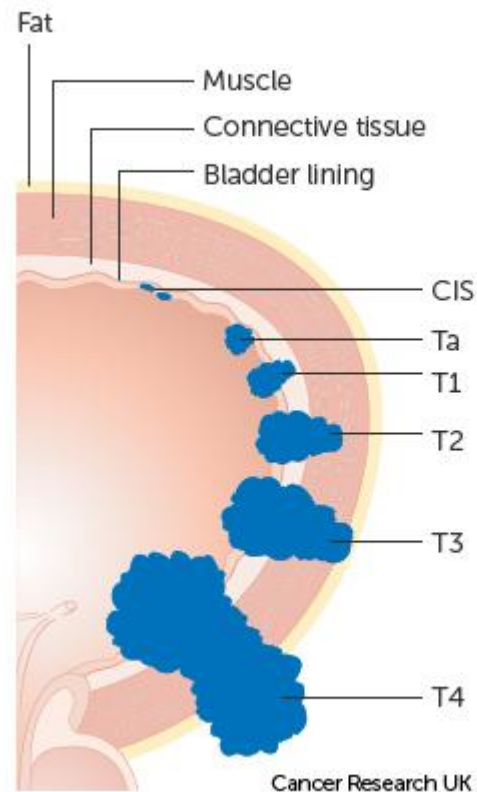
You can view this information in a larger print on our website.

What is staging?

Cancers are divided into stages, depending on how far they have grown. The staging system normally used in bladder cancer is called TNM, which stands for tumour, node, metastasis. So TNM staging takes into account how deeply the tumour has grown into the bladder, whether there is cancer in the lymph nodes, and whether cancer has spread to other parts of the body (metastasis).

The T stages of bladder cancer

Cancer that is only in the innermost lining of the bladder is classed as carcinoma in situ (CIS or Tis), or Ta. Cancer that has grown further into the bladder has a T number from 1 to 4. In T1, the cancer has started to grow into the connective tissue just under the bladder lining. In T4, it has spread outside the bladder. T2 and T3 are in between.



The number stages of bladder cancer

This staging system uses numbers to indicate the stage of the cancer. Doctors divide bladder cancer into 5 number stages, ranging from stage 0 to stage 4.

Grade

You may hear doctors talk about the grade of your cancer. This means how well developed the cells look under the microscope. In low grade cancers, the cells look very like normal cells and tend to grow slowly and stay within the bladder lining. High grade cancers tend to grow more quickly and are more likely to come back after treatment (recur) or to spread into the muscle layer of the bladder (progress).

What is advanced bladder cancer?

Advanced bladder cancer means the cancer has spread to another part of the body from where it started in the bladder. Your cancer may be advanced when it is first diagnosed. Or it may have come back some time after you were first treated. This is called recurrent cancer. Not all bladder cancers will spread or come back.

The cancer can spread into structures close to the bladder, such as the ureters, urethra, prostate or vagina or into the pelvis. This is called local spread. Cancer that has spread to another part of the body is called a secondary cancer or metastasis.

Bladder cancer statistics and outlook

Outlook means what is likely to happen in the future. Your doctor may call this your prognosis. With bladder cancer, the likely outcome depends on whether the cancer is just in the bladder lining or whether it has spread into the muscle wall of the bladder or beyond. The grade can also be important. The grade means how abnormal the cells look under the microscope.

We have quite detailed information about the likely outcome of different stages of bladder cancer on our website. The statistics we use are taken from a variety of sources, including the opinions and experience of the experts who check every section of our website. They are intended as a general guide only. For the more complete picture in your case, you'd have to speak to your own specialist.

How reliable are cancer statistics?

No statistics can tell you exactly what will happen to you. Your cancer is unique. The same type of cancer can grow at different rates in different people. The statistics cannot tell you about the different treatments people may have had, or how that treatment may have affected their prognosis. There are many individual factors that will affect your treatment and your outlook.

Treatment for locally advanced bladder cancer

If your cancer has grown through the bladder wall or has spread to lymph nodes but no further, it is called locally advanced bladder cancer. You may have removal of the bladder or radiotherapy to the bladder. This may cure the cancer for some people. As well as treatment to your bladder you may have nearby lymph nodes removed or have radiotherapy treatment to them. These treatments would be followed by chemotherapy into a vein.

Treatments for bladder cancer that has spread

For bladder cancer that has spread, you may have chemotherapy, radiotherapy or minor surgery to control the cancer and reduce symptoms for some time. Your doctor will discuss the options with you.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy for advanced bladder cancer can often shrink it or keep it under control for some time. But this treatment can be quite intensive.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy can help to relieve the symptoms of advanced bladder cancer, for example if you have pain from cancer that has spread to a bone. The radiotherapy will not cure your cancer but it can improve the quality of your life.

Surgery

If you still have cancer inside your bladder and it is causing symptoms, your specialist may suggest surgery to remove it. This is called debulking and is similar to having a cystoscopy.

Your doctor may also suggest an operation if the cancer is blocking your ureters or kidney.

Follow up for advanced bladder cancer

After your treatment has finished, you will need to have regular check ups.

Tests you may have

At check ups, your doctor will examine you. They will ask how you feel and whether you have any symptoms or worries. You may have a urine test. At some visits you might have a scan, X-ray or cystoscopy as well.

If you are worried or notice any new symptoms between check ups, tell your doctor or specialist nurse straight away. You don't have to wait for your next appointment

Worrying about your appointments

You may find your check ups quite worrying, especially at first. It may be helpful to tell someone close to you how you feel. Having someone go along with you to your check ups may help. If you find that worry is seriously affecting your life, you may find it helpful to have counselling. To find out about counselling, look in the coping with cancer section of our website.

What to ask your doctor about treating advanced bladder cancer

- What treatment do you recommend for bladder cancer that has spread?
- What is the aim of the treatment?
- What are the side effects of the treatment?
- Is there anything that can help with side effects?
- What happens if my cancer comes back again after this treatment?
- Are there any experimental treatments or trials you would recommend for me?
- Is there a counsellor I could talk things through with?
- Is there a specialist nurse I could see?
- What happens if I decide not to have treatment?

For more information, visit our website <http://www.cruk.org/about-cancer>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. Our information is based on the best current scientific evidence and reviewed regularly by leading clinicians and experts in health and social care.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on 0808 800 4040 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday.

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's website in September 2015. Cancer Research UK's website is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through Cancer Research UK's website and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. Copyright Cancer Research UK 2015. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and in the Isle of Man (1103)