

Diagnosing Cancer of Unknown Primary (CUP)

A Quick Guide

Contents

This is a brief summary of t' Diagnosing cancer of unknown primary CUP' from our website. You will find more detailed information on there. In this information there are sections on

- Tests for cancer of unknown primary (CUP)
- Questions for your doctor

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

Tests for cancer of unknown primary (CUP)

If you have symptoms or feel unwell, you usually begin by seeing your GP. Some people first go to their doctor with a very general cancer symptom, such as a lump somewhere in the body or a swollen lymph gland. Your GP will examine you and ask about your general health. They will ask you about your symptoms and will probably want you to have some blood tests. If your doctor suspects that you may have cancer, they will refer you to a specialist at your local hospital.

At the hospital

At the hospital the specialist will examine you and ask you to have some tests. Scans may show that the lump is likely to be a cancer. Or your doctor may take a sample of cells (biopsy) from the lump or lymph gland. The biopsy result may show that the cancer is a secondary cancer – meaning that the cancer cells have spread from somewhere else in the body. At first it may not be obvious what type of cancer cells they are and this is called an unknown primary. Your doctor will ask you to have tests to try to find the primary cancer. The tests you may have include:

- X-rays
- Scans
- A biopsy, which means removing a sample of tissue and looking at it under the microscope – how the cells look may help your doctor to find out where the cancer started

Sometimes tests can't find the primary cancer so it continues to be called a cancer of unknown primary. If you have a very advanced cancer when you first go to the doctor, it may not be sensible to put you through endless tests just to find out the cancer type. If the cancer has spread widely around your body, it may make more sense to focus on keeping the cancer under control and treating your symptoms.

What to ask your doctors about testing for cancer of unknown primary

- What tests are you going to do?
- Why do I have to have these tests?
- What will the tests show?
- Will the tests help to find the primary cancer?
- Are you going to do blood tests?
- What types of primary cancer are you checking for?
- Are any of these tests painful?
- Are there any risks with any of these tests?
- Can I eat normally before these tests?
- What are the side effects of these tests?
- Do I have to stay in hospital for any of these tests?
- Can I bring someone with me when I have the tests?
- How long will it take to get the results of the tests?
- Who will give me the test results?
- What happens if you can't find the primary cancer type?

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

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 Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in August 2014. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK 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 2014. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and in the Isle of Man (1103)