

Understanding

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# Muscle-invasive and advanced bladder cancer

Caring for people with cancer

## Understanding

# Muscle-invasive and advanced bladder cancer

This booklet has information on:

- Treatments
- Side-effects and how to manage them
- Coping with the emotional side of cancer
- Financial and practical matters

### Useful numbers

Specialist nurse

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Urologist

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Medical oncologist

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Radiation oncologist

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Radiation therapist

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Medical social worker

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Oncology ward

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Family doctor (GP)

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Emergency

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Hospital records number (MRN)



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# Fast facts

## What kind of treatment will I have? Page 35

The kind of treatment your doctor recommends will depend on the type of bladder cancer, how big it is and where it is found (the stage).

### How is muscle-invasive bladder cancer treated? (Page 51)

Muscle-invasive bladder cancer can be treated with cancer drugs, surgery to remove the bladder (or part of it), or radiotherapy.

### How is advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer treated? (Page 81)

Advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer can be treated with chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery.

## Are there side-effects from treatment? Page 89

Your doctor and the team caring for you will talk to you about possible side-effects. Read about each of the treatments to learn more about their side-effects.

There are treatments to help with most side-effects, so tell your doctor if you have any – they will want to know. It is important that you don't suffer in silence.

## Will I be OK? Page 33

What is likely to happen to you (your prognosis) is hard to predict. The best thing to do is to ask your consultant about your own situation.

## Clinical trials Page 39

Clinical trials are research studies that try to find new or better ways of treating cancer or reducing side-effects. Ask your consultant if there are any trials suitable for you.

## We're here for you Page 123

If you or your family have any questions or worries, want to know where to get support, or if you just need to talk, you can talk to one of our cancer nurses.

### Ways to get in touch

- Call our Support Line on **1800 200 700**
- Drop into a Daffodil Centre — visit [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) to find your local centre
- Email us: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

See page 123 for more about our services.



Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Reading this booklet



This booklet is to help you throughout your cancer treatment and afterwards. You will probably find different sections useful at different times, so keep it for reference.

- If you have **muscle-invasive bladder cancer** – read pages 53-79 for information about treatment for this type of bladder cancer.
- If you have **advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer** – read pages 83-87 for information about treatment for this type of bladder cancer.

If you need more information or don't understand something, ask your doctor or nurse. You can also ask one of our cancer nurses:

- Call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700
- Visit a Daffodil Centre
- Email the nurses at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

### About our information

While we make every effort to ensure the information in this booklet is correct and up to date, treatments and procedures in hospitals can vary.

You should always talk to your own medical team about your treatment and care. They know your medical history and your individual circumstances. We cannot give advice about the best treatment for you.

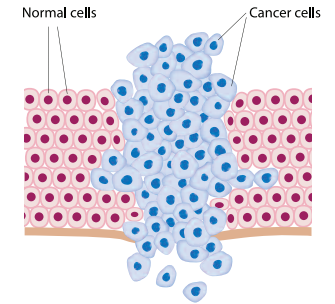
Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

# About bladder cancer

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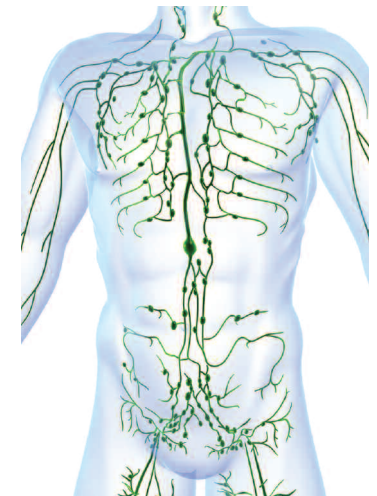
## What is cancer?

- **Cancer is a disease of the body's cells**  
Cancer cells are abnormal cells that grow without control. They can form a lump (tumour).
- **Cancers are named after the organ or cell where the cancer starts**  
Bladder cancer starts in cells in the bladder.
- **Cancers sometimes spread**  
If a tumour is cancerous (malignant), a cell or group of cells can be carried by your blood or lymph fluid to another part of your body, where it can form a new tumour. This is called metastasis.



## What is the lymphatic system?

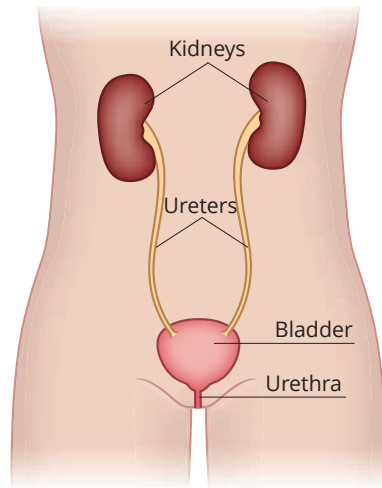
- The lymphatic system protects us from infection and disease and removes extra fluid and waste from the body's tissues. It is made up of lymph nodes connected by tiny tubes called lymph vessels.
- Lymph nodes are found mainly in the neck, armpit, groin and tummy.
- If cancer cells spread into lymph nodes or cancer starts in the lymph nodes, they can become swollen.



Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## What is the bladder?

Your bladder is a hollow organ like a balloon that sits in your pelvis. This is the lower part of your tummy. The bladder wall is made of muscles and lined with cells known as urothelial cells.

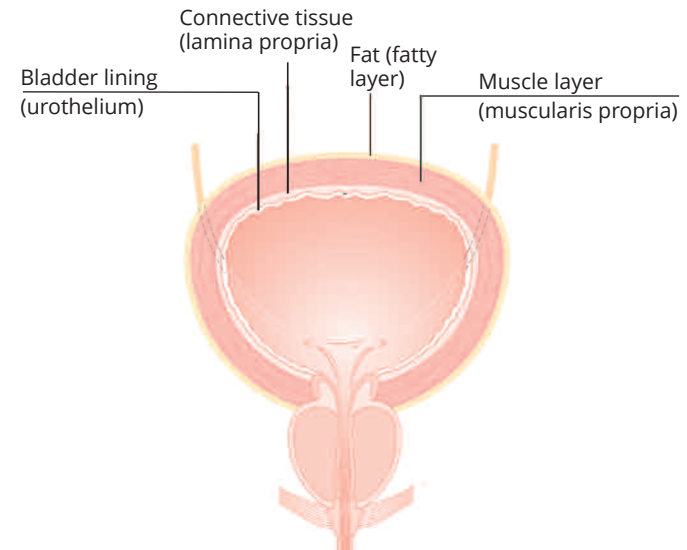


Your bladder stores urine until it is full. Urine is made in your kidneys. Urine is made up of water and waste products. The urine leaves your kidneys through tubes called ureters and drains into the bladder where it is stored.

The inside of the bladder has a special type of lining that stretches as the bladder fills up. This lining is called the urothelium or transitional epithelium. It stops urine from being absorbed into the body. When your bladder is full, nerves send a message to your brain that you need to pass urine. When you are ready to pass urine, the bladder muscle contracts. This forces the urine out through a tube called the urethra. This is sometimes called the water pipe.

In women, the urethra is short and leaves your body just next to your vagina. In men, the urethra is much longer and goes through your prostate gland and penis to leave your body.

The bladder is made up of many layers. The first layer is the urothelium. Below this layer is a thin layer of connective tissue called the lamina propria. Underneath this is muscle tissue called the muscularis propria. Around the muscle tissue is a fatty layer.



Pictures courtesy of Cancer Research UK/Wikimedia Commons

## What is bladder cancer?

Bladder cancer happens when abnormal cells appear in the lining of your bladder or in the bladder wall. Cancer cells can affect how the bladder works normally.

How your specialist treats your bladder cancer will depend on the stage and grade of the cancer. The stage refers to how far the cancer has grown into the bladder layers and the grade refers to the likelihood or risk of it coming back or spreading. See page 29 for more about staging and grading.

The cells in the lining of the bladder (urothelium) are called urothelial cells (also known as transitional cells). Because these cells line the bladder, they come into contact with waste products in the urine, such as chemicals in cigarette smoke, which may cause cancer.

## Urothelial bladder cancer

About 90% of bladder cancers diagnosed in Ireland are urothelial cancers, which means they affect the urothelial cells. Urothelial bladder cancer is also known as transitional cell cancer.

Rarely bladder cancer affects other types of cells.

- **Squamous cell bladder cancer:** This rare type of bladder cancer starts in the squamous cells, which make up the tissues that line our organs.
- **Adenocarcinoma:** This is a very rare bladder cancer. Adenocarcinoma starts in cells that produce mucus in the lining of our body organs.

These rarer types of bladder cancer are usually muscle invasive (see the next page).



## What are the types of bladder cancer?

### Non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer

This cancer only affects the lining of the bladder or the layer of tissue just beneath the surface lining of the bladder. It has not grown as far as the muscle or deeper layers of the bladder.

### Muscle-invasive bladder cancer

Muscle-invasive bladder cancer is when the cancer cells have grown into the muscle layer of the bladder, or beyond. Muscle-invasive bladder cancer needs more intensive treatment than non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer. This is because there is a risk that it could spread to other parts of the body.

### Advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer

Bladder cancer can also spread beyond the bladder. If this happens, it is called advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer. If the tumour has spread to nearby organs, it is called locally advanced disease. For example, to the womb and vagina in women or to the prostate in men. The lymph nodes in your pelvis can also be affected. If the cancer has spread to the liver, bones, lungs, or other parts of your body, these are known as distant metastases.

## What caused my cancer?

We don't know exactly what causes many cancers. However, there are things that can increase your risk of getting cancer. If you want to know more about why cancer happens or to learn about risk factors for bladder cancer, see our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) or talk to a cancer nurse – call our Support Line or visit a Daffodil Centre.





# Preparing for your hospital appointments

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## Preparing for your hospital appointments

Preparation is key to getting the most out of your hospital appointments. Being prepared also helps the doctors and nurses get the information they need to plan your care.



### Before your appointment

- **Write down a list of questions** and things you would like to discuss.
- **Know where you are going** and plan your journey (build in extra time for unexpected delays).
- **Dress in warm comfortable clothes and shoes** – sometimes you can be waiting around for a while. Layers are best, as the temperatures in hospitals can vary a lot. Loose-fitting clothing will be easier to manage if you are having your blood pressure taken, blood tests or a physical examination.
- **Try to drink clear fluids** (water or juice without pulp) if you are having a blood test and you aren't fasting. This can make it easier for the nurse or doctor to find a vein.
- **Check with the hospital if it is okay to bring someone with you.** Ask a friend or family member to go along for extra support.

## What to take to your appointment

Put together a list of things you might need to bring for your visit, including:

- **Your medical card**, if you have one
- **Your private health insurance details**, if you have insurance
- **The appointment letter from the hospital**, if you got one
- **A referral letter or GP letter**, if you got one
- **Your GP's name and contact details**
- **Your medical history** – remember, your doctor will likely ask you lots of questions so it's a good idea to have everything written down beforehand
- **Your list of questions**
- **A notebook and pen to take notes.** (Some healthcare professionals/nurses may be happy for you to record the meeting, but make sure you ask for their permission before doing so)
- **A list of your medications or the medication itself** – ask your pharmacist to print off a list of your medications. Hand-written lists can be hard to read or inaccurate
- **Be aware of when your prescription is due**, so you can ask for a prescription before you leave, if needed
- **Medications and any medical supplies you may need that day**, in case you are delayed
- **A light snack and drink** if you are likely to have to wait for some time. (Make sure you are not meant to be fasting – check with the hospital beforehand if you are not sure)
- **Your phone and your phone number**
- **Contact details of the person to call in an emergency**
- **Your glasses and hearing aid**, if you use them
- **A book or something to listen to** (including headphones) to pass the time while you wait

## Before leaving the appointment

- **Make sure you feel satisfied that your questions were answered** and that you have written down what you need to know
- **Make sure you know what will happen next**
- **Ask for the name or number of someone you can contact** in case you have further questions
- **Ensure you are booked in for your follow-up appointment** before you leave, if you have been asked to come back

## After the appointment

- **Arrange any tests in advance of your next appointment as soon as you can, for example, a blood test** – if your healthcare professional has asked for it

### Note

#### If you have to cancel your appointment...

If you are unable to attend your appointment, contact the hospital in advance and they will try to arrange a new appointment for you. If you don't go to your appointment or contact the hospital, you may have to return to your GP and go back on the waiting list for a new appointment.



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## Being diagnosed with bladder cancer

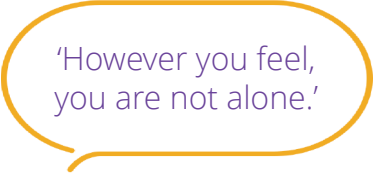
Hearing that you have bladder cancer can be a huge shock.

You may be feeling:

- Upset and overwhelmed by your emotions
- Confused by all the information being given to you
- Worried about what will happen next
- Angry that this is happening to you

If you need to talk to someone, or if you want support or advice:

- **Ask to speak to the cancer (oncology) liaison nurse or the medical social worker at the hospital.** They can help you and your family to cope with your feelings and advise you about practical matters
- **Talk to one of our cancer nurses in confidence** – visit a Daffodil Centre or call our Support Line on 1800 200 700. You can email the nurses at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)
- **Speak to an Irish Cancer Society Peer Support volunteer** who has had a cancer diagnosis and really knows what you are going through. Our cancer nurses can put you in touch with a volunteer
- **Talk to other people going through the same thing.** Join our online community at [www.cancer.ie/community](http://www.cancer.ie/community)
- **Go to your local cancer support centre.** For more information, see page 130



'However you feel,  
you are not alone.'

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Telling people about your diagnosis



Telling people about your diagnosis can help you to get support from friends and family. But you may feel you don't want to tell people straight away. You may be unsure how to break the news or need a little time to adjust. You may also worry about how other people will react. For example, they may fuss over you or be upset.

If you would like to talk things over with a cancer nurse, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. You can also ask for a copy of our booklet *Understanding the emotional effects of cancer*. It can help you find ways to talk about your cancer and to ask for the help and support you need.



## What tests will I have?

- Tests you may have include a cystoscopy, biopsy, CT scan, MRI scan and possibly a bone scan and PET scan.
- The tests will tell your medical team more about your cancer and help them to decide on the best treatment for you.

You might need more tests after you have been diagnosed with bladder cancer. The following tests give doctors more information about your bladder cancer. Some tests may also be used to see how well you are responding to treatment. Tests you may have include:

### Blood tests

Blood tests can help to check your general health. They will be done regularly during your treatment.

### Cystoscopy

A cystoscopy is usually done to look in your bladder and see if there are any cancer cells there. A cystoscopy uses a small tube to see inside your bladder. The tube is called a cystoscope and is like a telescope with a camera at one end. Your surgeon or specialist nurse will gently put the camera up through your water pipe to look into your bladder. Instruments can also be passed through the cystoscope so that the healthcare professional can take a biopsy (tissue sample). A cystoscopy is commonly performed under local anaesthetic, using a gel placed into your water pipe to numb the area. You will be awake during the test. In some cases it may be performed under general anaesthetic, where you will be asleep during the test.

## Biopsy

A biopsy is where a small sample of tissue is removed from your bladder and examined under a microscope. This can give more information about what type of bladder cancer you have and its grade (see page 32).

You usually have a biopsy during a cystoscopy as part of diagnosing your cancer. You may have a second biopsy and exam under general anaesthetic if the first biopsy sample was very small. Your surgeon will decide if you need a second cystoscopy for another biopsy or to make sure all the cancer has been removed.

## CT scan (CAT scan)/CT urogram (CTU)

This is a special type of X-ray that gives a detailed 3D picture of the tissues inside your body. For a CT scan of your urinary tract you might be asked to fast (not eat) for a few hours before the test. You may also be given an injection or a special drink to help show up parts of your body



on the scan. The injection may make you feel hot all over for a few minutes. During the scan you will lie on a table, which passes through a large doughnut-shaped machine. The scan is painless and takes between 10 and 30 minutes. You'll probably be able to go home as soon as the scan is over.

**For most scans you will be alone in the treatment room, but the medical team can still see you, hear you and speak to you. Just speak or raise your hand if you need anything.**

## MRI scan

An MRI scan uses magnetic energy to build up a picture of the tissues inside your body. During the test you will lie inside a tunnel-like machine. The length of time depends on the number of images that are needed and the area of the body being scanned.

Some people may feel claustrophobic inside the tunnel. Tell the radiographer if you're feeling anxious at the time of the examination.

An MRI can also be noisy, but you will be given earplugs or headphones to wear. You might get an injection before the scan to show up certain parts of your body.

During the scan you cannot wear metal jewellery. If you have any medical device in your body, like a pacemaker or pin, you may not be suitable for the test. Usually you can go home soon after the scan. You shouldn't need to stay in hospital.

## Other tests

In some cases, a bone scan or PET scan may be recommended.

## Bone scan

With rare types of bladder cancer, you may need to have a bone scan. The scan can check for signs that cancer has spread to the bones.

Before the scan, you will have an injection of a very small amount of a mildly radioactive substance, or radionuclide, usually into your arm. You will then have to wait for up to 3 hours for the radionuclides to travel through your body. When the radionuclides have passed through your body, you'll be asked to lie down on an X-ray table. A camera will then scan your entire body. Abnormal bone absorbs more radioactivity than normal bone, so these areas will show up on the scan as areas of activity known as 'hot spots'.

The scan lasts for up to an hour and you'll be able to go home immediately afterwards. The amount of radioactivity used in these scans is very low and safe and will disappear from your body within a few hours.

## PET scan

A PET scan can show if the cancer has spread to other tissues and organs. A low dose of radiotracer (radioactive sugar) is injected into your arm. An hour or so later you will have a scan. The PET scan uses the radiotracer to highlight cancer cells in the body.

Before the scan, you may have to fast (not eat) and drink only plain unflavoured water for a few hours. You may also be asked to avoid strenuous exercise the day before and the morning of the scan. During the scan, you will lie on a table that moves through a scanning ring. The scan usually lasts between 20 and 60 minutes. You will be asked to stay still during the scan.

You may have to travel to a specialist centre to have a PET scan, as not every hospital has these scanners.

You will be slightly radioactive after the PET scan, so it's best not to have close contact with pregnant women, babies or young children for a few hours after the scan.

Drink plenty of fluids and empty your bladder regularly after the scan; this can help flush the radiotracer from your body.

## Waiting for test results

It usually takes about 2 to 4 weeks for all the test results to come back. Naturally, this can be an anxious time for you. It may help to talk things over with the specialist nurse or with a relative or close friend. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to speak to a cancer nurse.

## Staging and grading bladder cancer

- Staging cancer means finding out how deeply the cancer has grown into the bladder and if it has spread.
- Grading means looking at the cancer cells to see how aggressive they are and how they might grow.
- Your prognosis is what your doctor expects to happen with your cancer.

Staging means finding out how deeply the cancer has grown into the bladder and if it has spread to other parts of your body. Grading describes how quickly the cancer may grow.

Staging and grading give your medical team more information about your cancer and helps them to plan the best treatment for you.





## How is bladder cancer staged?

There are different ways to describe the stages of cancer. The staging system most often used in bladder cancer is called TNM. It describes:

### Tumour (T)

The layers of the bladder the tumour has grown into and any nearby organs it involves.

### Nodes (N)

There are four lymph node stages in bladder cancer:

**N0** means there are no cancer cells in any lymph nodes

**N1** means there are cancer cells in one lymph node in the pelvis (between your hip bones)

**N2** means there are cancer cells in more than one lymph node in the pelvis

**N3** means there are cancer cells in one or more lymph node just outside the pelvis

### Metastasis (M)

**M1** means the cancer has spread to other parts of your body and **M0** means it hasn't. The parts of the body most likely to be affected are your bones, liver or lungs.

Your doctor often uses this information to give your cancer a number stage. A higher number, such as stage 4, means the cancer has spread to other parts of the body. Some stages are further divided into stage A and B. In general, the lower the number, the less the cancer has spread.

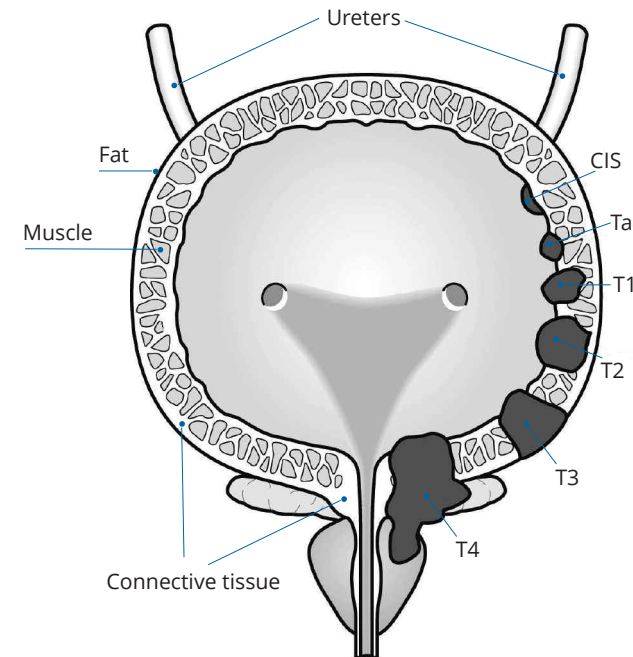
Staging can be hard to understand, so ask your doctor and nurse for more information if you need it.

Sometimes you may need surgery to find out the exact stage. This means that your treatment plan may only be decided or may change after you have had surgery.

## Staging non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer

The most common bladder cancer – non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer is staged as follows:

**Carcinoma in situ (CIS):** This appears as flat, red areas in your bladder. CIS is always classed as high grade because the cells are very abnormal and can grow quickly.



**Ta:** Here the tumour is found as a mushroom-like growth (papillary cancer) growing only in the innermost lining of your bladder.

**T1:** The tumour has started to grow into the connective tissue just below the bladder lining.

## Staging muscle-invasive and advanced bladder cancer

Muscle-invasive bladder cancer is staged as:

**T2:** The tumour has grown into the muscle layer in your bladder.

**T3:** The tumour has spread through the muscle layer to the outer fat layer around your bladder.

**T4:** The cancer has spread outside your bladder to other nearby organs, e.g. the prostate in men, or the womb or vagina in women, or into the pelvic wall.

## Advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer

In locally advanced disease, the cancer has spread to other nearby organs, e.g. the prostate in men, or the womb or vagina in women or in the nearby lymph nodes.

Bladder cancer that has spread beyond the surrounding areas, to other parts of your body such as the liver, bones or lungs is called advanced or metastatic bladder cancer.

## What are the grades of bladder cancer?

Bladder cancer can be described as either low grade or high grade. Your doctors can tell the grade of your tumour by looking at a sample of the cancer cells under the microscope. Low-grade bladder cancer is less likely to grow, spread, or come back after treatment.

High-grade tumours are more likely to grow, spread or come back after treatment. Muscle-invasive bladder cancer is almost always high grade.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Asking about your prognosis

Your prognosis includes information about how your cancer is likely to progress, including average survival times or life expectancy.

It's not always easy for doctors to answer a question about life expectancy. Everyone is different, so what happens to you might be quite different from what the doctor expects.



## Should I ask about my prognosis?

If your prognosis is better than expected, you may feel more hopeful about your illness and your future. You may feel more in control by having as much information as possible. Or you may not want to know about your prognosis. You may prefer not to think about the future too much or you may worry how you will cope if you get bad news.

If you decide you want information on your prognosis:

- **Think carefully about how you will cope with the information** before asking for your prognosis.
- **Get information on prognosis from your doctor.** They know your individual circumstances. Your doctor can also support you in understanding the information and answer any questions you have.

- **Ask a friend or family member to go with you**, if you would like some support.
- **Be careful with online information.** It may be hard to understand or it may be incorrect. Also, the information may not really apply to your situation or to your particular cancer type. Ask your doctor or nurse specialist for recommended websites.
- **Accept that you will need some time to think about what you have been told.** You may forget some things or there may be things you didn't understand. You may need to talk to your doctor or nurse again after you have thought about everything.



If you feel upset or anxious about your prognosis you can get support from friends, family or your hospital team. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700, visit a Daffodil Centre or email [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie). Our cancer nurses can give you support, information and advice. They can also tell you about free counselling and other services that can help you.

## About treatment

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## About treatment

- Your doctor will tell you about your treatment plan, depending on the type.
- A team of healthcare professionals will be looking after you (multidisciplinary team).

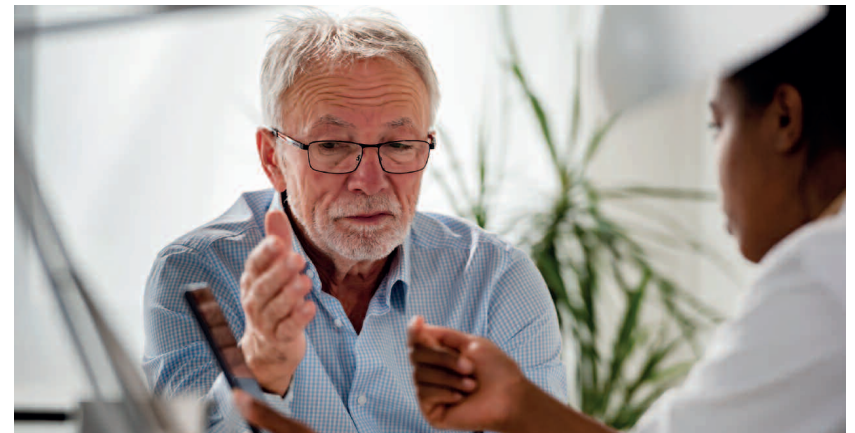
The type of treatment you receive will depend on:

- The size and stage of your cancer
- The type and grade of cancer
- If it has spread or not
- Your age and general health

In this book the treatment information is divided into 2 sections:

- See page 51 for **muscle-invasive cancer treatments**.
- See page 81 for **advanced (metastatic) cancer treatments**.

Ask your doctor or nurse if you are not sure about the type of bladder cancer you have or if you have any questions about your treatment.



## Your treatment plan

The treatment or treatments your doctors recommend for you are based on the latest research and international guidelines about the best ways to treat bladder cancer.

You may notice that other people with bladder cancer are not getting the same treatment as you. Their cancer may not be the same type or at the same stage as yours, so your treatment plan may be different.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions about your treatment plan.

## Specialist cancer centres

Bladder cancer is treated in specialist cancer centres in Ireland. The staff at these centres have a lot of experience in managing patients with bladder cancer. As a result, you may be transferred to another hospital from the one where you received your diagnosis, depending on your diagnosis and your suggested treatment plan.



## Clinical trials



Clinical trials are research studies that try to find new or better ways of treating cancer or reducing side-effects.

Patients with cancer are sometimes asked to consider taking part in a clinical trial. This means that instead of, or as well as, the standard treatment you may get a new trial drug. Or you may be given existing treatments used in different ways. For example, you may be given a different dose of a drug or two treatments may be used together.

Because the drugs are still in trial, you'll be very closely monitored and may have extra tests and appointments.

Trials often investigate very specific features of a particular cancer or treatment. You may not be suitable for a trial, even if it is researching your particular cancer. Your doctor can advise you about this.

### More information

It's best to talk to your doctor if you're interested in taking part in a clinical trial. For more information, you can read our factsheet *Cancer and Clinical Trials*. It's available to read or download on our website, [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie). You can also get a free copy by calling our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or by dropping into a Daffodil Centre. You can see a list of current cancer trials at [www.cancertrials.ie](http://www.cancertrials.ie)

## Deciding on treatment

### Multidisciplinary team

A multidisciplinary team (MDT) is a team of specialists involved in treating your type of cancer. For example, a surgeon, specialist nurse, radiation oncologist, radiologist, pathologist and oncologist (cancer doctor). The team will meet to discuss your test results and your suggested treatment plan.



### Understanding your treatment

Your doctor and nurse will explain your treatment options. Ask as many questions as you like. You could write down any questions you have in advance, so you don't forget anything. You could use the fill-in page at the back of this booklet for your questions and answers.

If you do forget something or need more explanations, ask your specialist nurse or talk to one of our cancer nurses – call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre.

## Time to think

It may feel as if everything is happening too fast. You may feel under pressure to make a decision. You can always ask for more time to decide about the treatment, if you are unsure when it's first explained to you.



### Second opinion

You might also find it reassuring to have another medical opinion to help you decide about your treatment. Your treating doctor or GP will refer you to another specialist for a second opinion if you feel this would be helpful. Getting a second opinion will not affect the care you will receive.

### Accepting treatment

You have the right to find out what a treatment option means for you, and the right to accept or refuse it. If you want to refuse a particular treatment, let your doctor or nurse know your concerns first. It may help to talk to your GP as well. The important thing is that you are fully aware of the benefits and risks.

## Who will be involved in my care?

Usually a team of health professionals will be involved in your treatment and care.

**Urologist:** A doctor who specialises in the urinary system and performs surgery to remove tumours from your body. They are in charge of your treatment. They have a team of doctors working with them.

**Medical oncologist:** A doctor who specialises in treating cancer patients using chemotherapy and other drugs.

**Radiation oncologist:** A doctor who specialises in treating cancer patients using radiotherapy.

**Radiation therapist:** A specially trained person who delivers radiotherapy and gives advice to cancer patients about their radiation treatment.

**Advanced nurse practitioner (ANP):** ANPs give expert information, treatment and support. They are specially trained to carry out tests and help to review your treatment.

### **Oncology liaison nurse / clinical nurse specialist (CNS):**

A specially trained nurse who works in a cancer care unit. She or he gives information and reassurance to you and your family from diagnosis and throughout treatment.

**Uro-oncology clinical nurse specialist (CNS):** A nurse who is specially trained to care for people with cancers of the urinary system.

**Stoma care nurse:** A specially trained nurse who can teach you how to care for a urostomy (stoma).

**Medical social worker:** A person trained to help you and your family with your social issues and emotional and practical needs. They can also give advice on social welfare benefits, financial matters and practical supports and services available to you.

**GP (family doctor):** While your medical team will be your main point of contact, your GP is still very much a part of your care and can be a great support to you. You can contact your GP about any worries you have or if you are finding it hard to cope.

**Physiotherapist:** A therapist who treats injury or illness with exercises and other physical treatments related to the illness.

**Dietitian:** An expert on food and nutrition. They are trained to give advice on diet during your illness and use diet to help symptoms.

**Psycho-oncology team:** These are specialists in psychological care and support for cancer patients. Usually the team includes psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and nurses.

**Community health services:** These include family doctors, public health nurses (who can visit you at home), community welfare officers and home-help organisers. Your local health centre or the medical social worker in the hospital can advise you about these services.

**Pharmacists:** Pharmacists – in hospital and in your local pharmacy – dispense chemotherapy and other cancer drugs. They can give advice on cancer drugs, such as how to take them, side-effects and possible interactions between your cancer drugs and other medicines, food and drink, and supplements such as herbs and vitamins.

**Palliative care team:** This team is experienced in managing pain and other physical symptoms. They can help you and your family cope with any emotional distress. They are sometimes known as the symptom management team. A specialist palliative care service is available in most hospitals. Palliative care teams also work in the community.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Giving consent for treatment

Before you start any treatment, you should be asked to sign a consent form saying that you understand what the treatment is for and that you give permission for treatment to be given. Before treatment, you should have been given full information about:

- What the treatment is for
- The type and amount of treatment you will have
- The benefits and risks of the treatment
- Possible side-effects from treatment
- Any other treatments that may be available



If you are confused about the information given to you, let your doctor or nurse know straight away. They can explain it to you again. Some treatments can be hard to understand and may need to be explained more than once. You can still change your mind after you have started treatment. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any worries about your treatment plan.

## Waiting for treatment to start

Planning cancer treatment takes time. Most people want to start treatment right away. You may worry that the cancer will spread during this time.



Cancer treatment should start soon after diagnosis. But for most cancers, waiting for scans or treatment for a few weeks does not usually affect how well the treatment works.

If you are worried, talk to your doctor. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to speak to a cancer nurse.

**Ask your specialist nurse or visit a Daffodil Centre for information on our pre-treatment education workshops. The workshops give information on cancer treatments, including what to expect and how to manage side-effects.**



## How can I help myself?

It can be very difficult to cope with a cancer diagnosis and all the changes that this can bring. Your healthcare team can offer you different types of support, but there are also things you can do yourself to prepare for treatment and try to feel better.

### Eat well

Eating well when you have cancer can help you feel better. It can help you to:

- Keep up your energy and strength
- Keep your weight stable and avoid muscle loss
- Tolerate your treatment better so you can finish your course of treatment
- Cope better with side-effects of treatment
- Reduce your risk of infection and other complications
- Recover faster



Ask to talk to the dietitian at the hospital for advice on the best diet for you. You can also read our booklet *Diet and Cancer*. To get a copy, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700, visit a Daffodil Centre or download it on our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

### Stay active

If you are able, it can really help to be active before, during and after your treatment. Keeping up or increasing your activity levels can help to:

- Reduce tiredness and some treatment side-effects
- Reduce anxiety and depression
- Improve your mood and quality of life
- Strengthen your muscles, joints and bones
- Reduce the risk of other health issues

Talk to your doctor or nurse before starting or increasing the amount of exercise you take. They can advise you on the type and amount of exercise that is safe for you.

### Quit smoking

If you are coping with a cancer diagnosis, you may find it stressful to quit smoking. However, research tells us that:

- Non-smokers are likely to have fewer or less severe side-effects during cancer treatment. For example, chest infections
- Smoking can reduce how well chemotherapy or radiotherapy work
- Not smoking can help you to heal better after surgery
- Quitting reduces your chance of further illness

If you would like advice or support on quitting, call the HSE Quit Team on CallSave 1800 201 203, visit [www.QUIT.ie](http://www.QUIT.ie) or Freetext QUIT to 50100. Some hospitals have a stop-smoking service, with advisors who can help and support you.



## Other ways to help yourself

### Get information about your cancer and treatment

Understanding cancer and its treatment and knowing what to expect can help to relieve anxiety and stress for some people. If it makes you anxious, you could ask a friend to do the research for you, and tell you anything important. Make sure you get your information from trustworthy sources like your medical team, the Irish Cancer Society and the HSE.

### Involve your family and close friends

Don't keep any worries or physical problems secret from the people closest to you. Ask someone close to you to come with you when you are visiting the doctor and when treatments will be discussed. Your friends and family will be affected by your diagnosis too, so try to talk openly and find ways to support each other.



### Use your support network

Don't be shy about asking for help. Family and friends may not know the best way to help you, so tell them what you need. For example, lifts to the hospital, practical help at home, childminding or just some company or support. Telling people what you need and how they can help means you will get the right amount of support to suit you.

## Try relaxation and stress management techniques

Therapies like meditation or yoga can help you to cope with stress. Some cancer support centres provide groups to help you learn these techniques.

### Accept change in your life

Accept that you may not be able to carry on exactly as before. Give yourself time to adjust to your new routine.



### Know that there will be ups and downs

Sometimes people feel they have to be brave or positive all the time, but it's normal to have bad days. Get help if you are finding it hard to cope.

### Try to cope day by day

Don't think about the future too much. Concentrate on the present and getting through each day of tests or treatment. That way, you may find it easier to cope with your illness.



# Treatment for muscle-invasive bladder cancer

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## How is muscle-invasive bladder cancer treated?

The following can be used to treat muscle-invasive bladder cancer:

- **Chemotherapy**
- **Surgery** to remove your bladder
- **Radiotherapy**

Your doctor will let you know which treatments are most suitable for you. Often people will have chemotherapy to shrink the cancer, followed by surgery or radiotherapy. You may be offered a choice between surgery and radiotherapy. Your doctor and specialist nurse can help you to make your decision. You may also have chemotherapy after surgery, to reduce the risk of the cancer coming back.



If surgery isn't an option for you, the main treatment is radiotherapy, usually given along with chemotherapy (chemoradiation).

## Chemotherapy

- Chemotherapy drugs are used to kill cancer cells or slow their growth.
- Chemotherapy can cause a range of side-effects.
- Side-effects normally go after treatment ends.

Chemotherapy is a treatment using drugs to kill cancer cells. The doctor who specialises in chemotherapy is called a medical oncologist. Chemotherapy for muscle-invasive bladder cancer may be given:

- **Before surgery or radiotherapy to shrink** the cancer and reduce the risk of it coming back. This is called neo-adjuvant treatment.
- **At the same time as radiotherapy** to make the treatment work better (chemoradiation).
- **After surgery** to reduce the risk of the cancer coming back. This is called adjuvant treatment.
- **As a treatment on its own** for advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer.

A few chemotherapy drugs are often used together for muscle-invasive or advanced bladder cancer. Your doctor or nurse will discuss your treatment with you. For more information on different types of chemotherapy or a copy of the booklet *Understanding Chemotherapy and other cancer drugs*, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. See our *Understanding Chemotherapy* video series on [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) which also has valuable information on chemotherapy.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## How is chemotherapy given?

Chemotherapy may be given directly into a vein as an injection and/or through an intravenous infusion (by drip or pump). It may also be given in tablet form.

You may have a central venous access device fitted. This is a thin tube (line) which goes directly into a vein and stays in place until your treatment is over. This saves you having repeated injections. There are different types of central venous access devices, such as ports, Hickman lines and PICC lines. There's more about ports and lines on our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)



## How often will I need chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is often given in cycles with a rest period between treatments. This rest period allows your body time to recover from the side-effects of treatment. The number of cycles can vary, depending on your cancer type and how well it is responding to treatment. Usually your treatment will be given in the oncology day unit.

## Understanding your drug treatment

It's important that you understand the drugs you have been given. Ask your doctor or specialist nurse for more information about your drug treatment and any possible side-effects. They should give you a printed sheet to take home with you.

If you know the name of your drug, you can visit the Health Products Regulatory Authority's website at [www.hpra.ie](http://www.hpra.ie) for information about the drug and possible side-effects.

If you have any questions or need any more information, you can speak to our cancer nurses by calling our Support Line on 1800 200 700.



## What are the side-effects of chemotherapy?

The side-effects of chemotherapy vary from person to person. Some people have fewer side-effects than others. The type of side-effects you might get and how severe they are mainly depends on the amount of chemotherapy you have and the drugs used. Ask your doctor or nurse if you're worried about side-effects or have any questions.

Most side-effects can be helped by medication. Usually the side-effects go away when the treatment ends or soon after. Side-effects may include:

### Fatigue

Fatigue is very common. It can make you feel tired and weak. For more information see page 91.

### Nausea and vomiting

Chemotherapy can cause nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick). There are treatments that work well to prevent nausea and vomiting. Tell your doctor or nurses if they are not working well for you. Thinking or talking about the treatment can also make you feel sick. This is called anticipatory nausea. Tell your doctor or nurse if you have these side-effects.

### Risk of infection

Chemotherapy drugs make you more likely to get infections. You will be asked to watch out for signs of infection at all times and let the hospital know if you have any. These signs include feeling shivery and unwell, having a high or low temperature, having a cough or sore throat, pain passing urine or increased frequency in going to the toilet to pass urine.

### Anaemia

Chemotherapy can cause the bone marrow to make fewer red blood cells. Having fewer red blood cells is called anaemia. Anaemia can make you feel tired and breathless. Regular blood tests to measure your red cell count will be done during treatment. You may need a blood transfusion to treat your anaemia.

### Bleeding and bruising

Chemotherapy can stop your bone marrow from making enough platelets. Platelets help make your blood clot and stop bleeding. With fewer platelets you may bleed or bruise very easily. Tell your doctor if you have any bruising or bleeding that you can't explain, such as nosebleeds or bleeding gums.

## Mouth and throat problems

Chemotherapy can cause mouth and throat problems including a dry mouth, ulcers and gum infections. There are many mouthwashes and medications to help, which your doctor can prescribe for you.



## Hair loss (alopecia)

Some chemotherapy drugs can cause hair loss from all over your body. This can be very distressing. It can affect your confidence and make you feel self-conscious about your cancer. How much hair falls out depends on the drug given, the dose and your own reaction to it. Hair will grow back 3-6 months after you stop chemotherapy.

## Constipation and diarrhoea

Chemotherapy can cause constipation (not having a bowel movement often enough) and diarrhoea (frequent loose or watery bowel movements). Your doctor can give you medication to help, if needed.

## Skin and nail changes

Skin may become dry, flaky and itchy. Nails may become dark, yellow or brittle.

## Peripheral neuropathy

Some drugs can affect your nerve endings. It's important to tell your doctor if you have numbness or a tingling or burning sensation in your hands and feet. This is known as peripheral neuropathy.

## Changes in kidney or liver function

Some drugs can irritate or damage kidney and liver cells. Decreased urination, swelling of the hands or feet (oedema) or headaches are some of the signs of kidney damage; yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice) can be a sign of liver problems. Tell your doctor if you have these or any other changes in your body. Blood tests will check your kidney and liver function regularly.

## Allergy

On rare occasions people can have a reaction to certain chemotherapy drugs. Reactions can include rash, itching, low blood pressure and shortness of breath. Contact the hospital if you have these side-effects.

## Blood clots

Chemotherapy and having cancer can both increase your risk of developing blood clots. A blood clot may cause pain, redness and swelling in your leg, or breathlessness and chest pain. Contact your hospital immediately if you have any of these symptoms, as blood clots can be serious. Usually they are treated with medication to thin your blood.

If you have any symptoms that are troubling you or you feel unwell, tell your doctor or nurse straight away. You will be given contact details of who to contact before you start your treatment.

For more information on the side-effects of chemotherapy or a copy of the booklet *Understanding chemotherapy and other cancer drugs*, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. You can also look at our website, [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) for tips on coping with different side-effects.

## Surgery

### Radical or total cystectomy

Surgery to remove your bladder is called a cystectomy. If the surgeon removes just part of your bladder, this is called a partial cystectomy. For most people, the whole bladder will be removed, which is called a radical or total cystectomy. The type of procedure you have will depend on the stage of the cancer and your general health.

Having all or part of your bladder removed is major surgery. It is only carried out in a small number of hospitals (specialist centres). You may have to travel to your nearest specialist centre to talk to your surgeon about the operation and to have the surgery done.

### What are the ways of doing surgery?



Surgery to remove your bladder can be done in a number of ways. Not all are available in all hospitals in Ireland, so discuss your preference with your surgeon.

Radical cystectomy may be performed with open surgery or keyhole surgery.

**Open surgery:** Most cystectomies are open surgeries. The surgeon makes a single cut in your lower abdomen (tummy area).

**Keyhole (laparoscopic) surgery:** A few small cuts are made in your abdomen. A tube with a light and camera and special instruments are put in through the cuts. The urologist uses computer and robotic arms to help to remove your bladder.

In a radical cystectomy (surgery to remove the whole bladder), your surgeon removes nearby tissues, lymph nodes and organs as well as the bladder. In men, the prostate, seminal vesicles and part of urethra are removed. In women, the ovaries, womb, cervix, part of the vagina and the urethra are usually removed.

If your whole bladder has been removed, your surgeon will need to find a new way to drain your urine. This is done at the same time as the cystectomy.



### Ways of draining urine

There are 3 ways in which your surgeon can divert your urine:

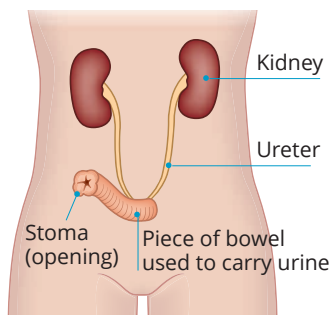
- **Urostomy (ileal conduit).** This is the most common type
- **Continent urinary diversion**
- **Bladder reconstruction (neobladder)**

These will be discussed and explained to you by your surgeon and specialist nurse.

You may need to travel to a different hospital for your surgery if your doctor recommends continent urinary diversion or bladder reconstruction.



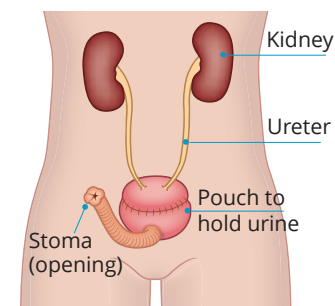
**Urostomy (ileal conduit):** This is the most common type of urinary diversion. Your surgeon will use part of your small bowel to bring urine to an opening outside your body. This is known as a urostomy or an ileal conduit. To do this, your surgeon uses about 6 inches of your small bowel to make a tunnel. The two kidney tubes (ureters) will then be attached to it. One end of the passage is closed up with stitches, while the other end is brought through to the surface of your tummy. The open end is called a stoma and looks like the skin inside your cheek. You will need to wear a bag attached to the stoma to collect and drain your urine.



A flat, watertight bag is placed over the stoma to collect your urine. The side of the bag that is placed on the skin around the stoma has a paste that seals onto the skin. The bag will fill with urine and you will need to empty it regularly. A stoma nurse will show you how to take care of it.

**Continent urinary diversion/continent catheterisable pouch:**

With this type of urinary diversion, you don't need an external bag to collect your urine. Your surgeon uses a piece of your bowel to make an internal pouch that can store urine inside your tummy. The two kidney tubes (ureters) will then be attached to it. Urine will drain through the ureters into this pouch. The internal pouch that replaces your bladder is connected to your tummy wall by a stoma. Your surgeon will create a one-way valve to keep the urine inside the pouch. You empty urine from the pouch through the stoma using a thin tube called a catheter. You will need to do it about 5 or 6 times a day. A stoma nurse will teach you how to do it. In this case, you do not need a urinary pad or bag. The stoma opening is covered with a bandage.

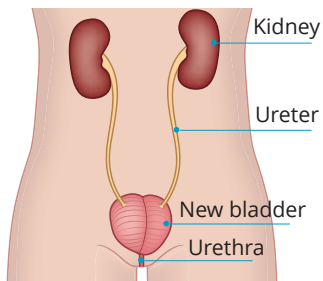


Advantages	Disadvantages
There is no smell and little risk of leakage	<b>Longer surgery time</b>
Requires less time to recover	<b>The stoma will need regular care</b>
Urine is stored inside the body until you are ready to empty it	<b>Larger amount of bowel tissue taken, so more of the bowel is disrupted.</b>
Small bandage over the stoma may cause fewer body image issues than the ileal conduit (page 62)	<b>May have problems absorbing nutrients</b>
Less risk of back-up of urine into the kidney	<b>You will need to use a tube (catheter) to empty the pouch every 4-6 hours</b>
	<b>Small risk of leakage when pouch is full</b>
	<b>Greater risk of surgical complications</b>
	<b>Greater risk of needing more surgery</b>

Advantages	Disadvantages
Simplest of the surgeries	<b>The stoma will need regular care</b>
Requires less time to recover	<b>There is an external visible bag to collect urine</b>
Less disruption to the bowel than the other urinary diversions	<b>The stoma bag may leak or smell occasionally</b>
No need for a catheter	<b>Urine may travel back up to the kidneys, causing infection</b>
	<b>It may affect how you feel about your body (your body image)</b>

**Bladder reconstruction:** In this type of surgery, instead of making a stoma, the surgeon makes a new pouch out of bowel tissue. The kidneys drain the urine into this pouch. The pouch is then connected to your urethra. The pouch (known as a neobladder) stores urine like your bladder did, and you pass urine out through your urethra.

You can empty the pouch by holding your breath and pushing down into your tummy. You will need to do this regularly as you won't know when your bladder is full. Your hospital team will give you more information about this.



## Getting ready for surgery

### Tests

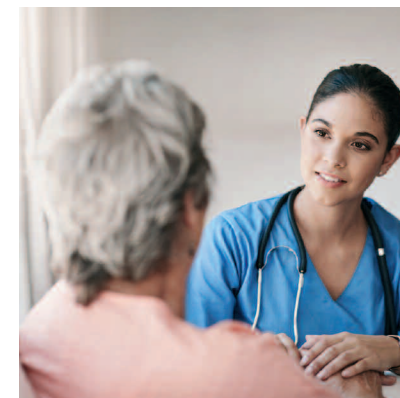
To make sure you are fit for surgery, some tests may be done. These could include a chest X-ray, heart test (ECG), blood pressure and more blood tests.

### Deep breathing exercises

A physiotherapist will show you how to do deep breathing exercises. These will help to prevent a chest infection or blood clots after surgery. Your nurse will arrange for you to have a pair of elastic stockings as well. These are to prevent you getting blood clots in your legs after surgery.

### Preparing for a stoma

The stoma nurse will visit you before surgery to discuss having a stoma (urostomy). She or he will mark on your skin the best place for the new stoma to be located. It is usually placed where it best suits your needs and where you can see it. This will also depend on whether you are left- or right-handed.



### Before surgery

You will not be allowed to eat anything for a few hours before your surgery. As part of the bowel is used to make the stoma, an enema may be given before surgery to clear the bowel.

You may get an anti-clotting injection like heparin and be advised to put on your elastic stockings (to prevent blood clots).

Advantages	Disadvantages
No stoma	<b>Surgery takes longer than ileal conduit option</b>
Avoids urine back-up into the kidneys	<b>Recovery can be lengthy and lots of physio is required to get control of the neobladder</b>
Most like your normal urinary flow	<b>Leakage of urine (incontinence) is normal while you learn how to regain control of urination. This can take up to 6 months</b>
	<b>Some patients will always leak a few drops of urine and will need to continue to wear pads</b>
	<b>Some will not be able to empty the neobladder and will need to use a catheter to drain it</b>
	<b>Most patients will need to get up more often at night to empty their bladder</b>
	<b>Night time leakage can also be a problem for some</b>
	<b>The bowel is disrupted to provide the tissue to make the neobladder</b>

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## After the surgery

You may stay in an intensive care or high dependency unit (HDU) where the staff will keep you under close observation for a day or two, or you may go straight to the ward.

### Drips, drains and tubes

When you wake up, you will have some tubes attached to your body. Don't be alarmed as they are normal after an operation like this.

- **You will have a drip in a vein in your arm.** You will be given fluids through this until you can drink again.
- **Urostomy bag and ureteric stents:** The urostomy bag is the bag that collects urine and attaches to the skin around your newly formed stoma. Ureteric stents are fine tubes placed in the stoma that help the flow of urine from your kidneys.
- **One or more thin tubes called drains may be coming out of your tummy (abdomen) near your wound.** These help to drain blood, bile and fluid from the operation site to let your wound heal.

### Pain

You may have some pain after the operation, especially when you cough or move. Your nurse can give you medicine to control the pain and prevent you feeling or getting sick, if you need it.

You may have an epidural tube in your back to relieve pain after the surgery. If you have a patient controlled analgesia pump (PCA), your nurse will show you how to use it. Always ask for help if you have any pain or feel sick.



### Wound

If you have open surgery, the wound site will be along your tummy. The line of stitches will go from your navel (belly button) to your pubic bone. Stitches or staples are usually removed 7 to 10 days after your surgery.

## Eating and drinking

It will take a few days before you can return to normal eating and drinking. At first, you will be able to take sips of water. Gradually the amount of fluids will be increased and you can begin to take light meals.



### Getting up and about

A physiotherapist will visit you regularly after surgery. These visits are to help you with breathing and leg exercises. Even when you are in bed you will be encouraged to move your legs and do deep breathing exercises at least once an hour. On the day after surgery the physio or nurse will help you get out of bed and take you for a short walk. These walks will become more frequent and longer as you get better.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Side-effects of surgery

### Bleeding and infection

With all surgeries there is a small risk of bleeding and infection. For example, infection in your wound, chest or urine. Your doctors and nurses will watch you closely to make sure these risks are reduced, or treated quickly if they happen. You can also help to prevent infection yourself by having good hygiene and doing deep-breathing exercises.

### Blood clots

There is a risk of blood clots in the lungs or legs. Doing your breathing and leg exercises (see page 67) can reduce this risk.



### Urine leakage

There is a risk of urine leakage from the newly formed pouch in the first few days after surgery.

### Bowel side-effects

There is a small risk that your bowel will become inactive and take a while to return to normal. This is known as paralytic ileus. It can happen after any surgery that involves handling of the bowel. There is also a very small risk of a bowel leak. This is because your bowel has been divided to take a part out and the two ends have been joined together.

## Sexual problems

Surgery to remove your bladder can cause damage to the muscles and nerves in the pelvic area. This means that you may experience physical problems when having sex. It may make sex more uncomfortable or you may have a loss of libido (sex drive). Sex may feel different and your orgasms may be affected. There are also emotional issues relating to a change in body image and loss of libido (sex drive). See page 93 for more about your sex life.

**Shortening or narrowing of the vagina:** Bladder surgery or radiotherapy might shorten or narrow your vagina. This can make sex uncomfortable. Regular gentle sex or using a special device called a dilator can help with this side-effect. Dilators are tampon-shaped plastic tubes of different sizes that you use with a lubricant.

Your specialist nurse will advise you on how helpful a dilator may be in your situation and explain how to use them. You may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable, but your specialist nurse will understand your concerns and will always respect your feelings.

**Vaginal dryness:** Radiotherapy to the pelvis can cause vaginal dryness. This can make having sex uncomfortable. Vaginal creams or moisturisers can be used regularly to help with day-to-day dryness.

Vaginal lubricants can be used during sex to make it more comfortable and pleasurable. Hormonal creams and moisturisers can also help with vaginal dryness. Your doctor or nurse specialist can give you advice about the best products to help.



**Erectile dysfunction:** You may find it hard to get or keep an erection after surgery or radiotherapy for bladder cancer. This is called erectile dysfunction or impotence. There are medications and other treatments that can help with erectile dysfunction. For example, tablets, injections, vacuum pumps or implants to help you get an erection. Your doctor can advise you about treatment that may help. You can also talk to a cancer nurse in confidence by calling our Support Line on 1800 200 700. You can also email the nurses: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

After a cystectomy you will be unable to father a child naturally. See page 95 for more about fertility and bladder cancer.

### Caring for your urostomy

After the surgery, your urine will pass down the ureters from your kidneys, through the piece of bowel and out through the stoma.



You will need to wear a waterproof bag over the stoma to collect the urine. This bag is called a urostomy bag and it sticks to the skin around the stoma. You can empty the bag as often as needed. For the first 7 to 10 days, fine plastic tubes will be placed up through the ureters. These are called ureteric stents and they support the new system while healing occurs. The stents can be seen coming out of the stoma into the urostomy bag. They will usually be removed by your stoma nurse before you go home.

After surgery, your stoma nurse will visit you to check how you are getting on. It can take a while to adjust to having a stoma. Your stoma nurse and other nurses will teach you how to care for your urostomy. They will show you how to put the bag on correctly so that it protects the skin around the stoma. That way, your skin will not be damaged by urine.

It can take a while before you feel confident about managing the urostomy bags. Once you go home, there is further help available. The community stoma nurse can visit you at home to discuss any concerns. You may also find it helpful to talk to someone who has learned to live with a urostomy. Your nurse may be able to arrange for someone to talk to you and tell you about how they coped. This advice can be very helpful, especially in the first few months after your operation.

If you need information and support from a cancer nurse, you can call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre.

### Going home

Most patients are ready to go home between 7 to 10 days after surgery, but it varies greatly from patient to patient. Before you go home your nurse will make sure you have the necessary arrangements for removal of wound clips and supplies of urostomy bags.



## Getting supplies

When you leave hospital, you will be given some dressings and urostomy bags to last a few days. You will also be given a prescription for more supplies from your stoma nurse. Go to the pharmacy to get these as soon as possible. Most pharmacies do not keep them in stock and it may take a few days for supplies to arrive. Some pharmacies have a direct delivery service where you can telephone in your order and they will send out your supplies by post. Ask your stoma nurse if this service is available in your area.



## Help at home

If you live alone or have problems getting around the house, talk to your nurse or medical social worker on your ward as soon as you are admitted to hospital. That way he or she can put in place any community services that you may need after you leave hospital. For example, they can contact your local public health nurse and/or community stoma nurse, so that they can come out to see you when you are home. You can also contact the hospital or stoma nurse if you have any problems at home.

## Hints and tips: Living with a urostomy/stoma



- **The stoma bag will usually last 3 to 5 days.** Do not change it earlier unless needed. If you remove the adhesive flange more frequently, it may irritate and damage the skin around your stoma, causing soreness.
- **If the stoma bag leaks, change it as soon as you can.** The longer your skin is exposed to urine, the more your skin might suffer.
- **The stoma bag will not stick so well to moist or damaged skin.** This may cause odours and leaking bags.
- **Empty the stoma bag before it gets too full** as the weight of the urine may 'pull' on the flange. This can cause the flange to come away from your skin.
- **It is normal to find mucus in your urine.** The part of your bowel used to form the urostomy makes the mucus.
- **Make sure you are using a stoma bag of the correct size.** Your stoma may get smaller as time goes by.
- **Keep enough supplies so you don't run out.** You may wish to keep a spare stoma bag in the car or at work in case the stoma bag needs to be changed. Keep a plastic bag handy for getting rid of used supplies.
- **When you go on holiday, remember to take enough supplies with you.** Keep your supplies in your hand luggage in case your suitcase gets lost. Travel certificates are available from your stoma nurse to help you bring your supplies through security at the airport.

## Being comfortable

There are many stoma accessories to help make life more comfortable for you. These include girdles, support belts, deodorisers, wipes, skin protective wipes, lotions and creams, adhesive removers, stoma paste, rings and disposal bags. There are also snug clothes like underwear and swimwear you can wear. Talk to your stoma nurse about what is best for you.

## Sex after urostomy

As well as the physical effects of bladder surgery, having a urostomy can affect how you feel about your body. You may also be afraid that the urostomy bag will become dislodged or cause damage to the stoma. Empty the bag before sexual intimacy and roll it up or tape it down so it will not get in the way, if you wish. If you need more advice talk to your doctor, specialist nurse or stoma nurse, they are all experienced in dealing with these issues.

### Carry the card

The Irish Cancer Society has a card that you can show at shops and other public places to get urgent access to a toilet. Get one from a Daffodil Centre or by calling our Support Line on 1800 200 700.



## Follow-up after surgery

You will be given a date to come back for a check-up, often about 4-6 weeks after your surgery. Your doctor will check how you are and discuss any test results with you. Your doctor will also talk to you about any further treatment you may need. There is more about follow-up on page 79.

## Radiotherapy

- Radiotherapy uses high-energy rays to kill cancer cells.
- You normally have treatment every Monday to Friday for a number of weeks.
- Side-effects affect the area of the body where the radiotherapy is aimed.
- Side-effects normally go once your treatment is over, but some can last a long time or develop later on.

Radiotherapy is a treatment that uses high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells. The aim of radiotherapy is to destroy the cancer cells with as little damage as possible to normal cells. Radiotherapy for muscle-invasive bladder cancer can be given at different times and for different reasons:

- **Instead of surgery**
- **Before surgery** to shrink a tumour
- **After surgery** to destroy any remaining tumour
- **With chemotherapy** to make the treatment work better (chemoradiation)
- **To relieve symptoms** such as pain, discomfort, bleeding or a blockage if the cancer is advanced or has come back. This is called palliative radiotherapy
- **To treat a single spread of cancer**, such as in your bone

The type of radiotherapy used for bladder cancer is called external beam radiotherapy. This means the radiation comes from machines that aim X-rays directly at your tumour or the tumour site. The radiation is also aimed at a small area of normal tissue around the tumour just in case any cancer cells have spread.

## Planning your treatment

Radiotherapy must be carefully planned so that the highest dose is given to the tumour area and as little as possible to the nearby cells.

You will have a planning (simulation) appointment, which includes a CT scan to pinpoint the area to be treated. You may have extra scans or X-rays taken to plan your treatment. The treatment field or area will be marked carefully on your skin, usually using tiny tattoo dots. The dose of radiation will be decided and tightly controlled for your treatment.



## Getting your treatment

During treatment you will first be positioned carefully on a treatment table. Then the machine will move around you so that you receive the precise treatment at different angles.

Usually treatment takes several minutes and is painless. Most people receive radiotherapy as outpatients, travelling to the radiotherapy unit every Monday to Friday, with a break over the weekend.

Radiotherapy is normally given in special cancer treatment centres. These centres need highly-trained staff and space for the large equipment involved. As a result, the centre may be some distance from the hospital where you received surgery or chemotherapy.

External radiotherapy does not make you radioactive. There is no danger to you and your family. You do not have to avoid children or pregnant women.

## How much radiotherapy do I need?

The course can be several treatments over a number of days or weeks (6 to 8 weeks), or between 1 and 10 doses for palliative treatment.

## Side-effects of treatment

Radiotherapy is given directly to the site of the cancer. Therefore, side-effects are usually related to the part of your body being treated. How severe these side-effects are will vary from person to person. It depends on the amount of treatment you receive.

Most side-effects develop during or shortly after your treatment and get better within a few weeks. Late side-effects may develop some time after treatment. Some side-effects are long-term or may even be permanent.

### Possible short-term side-effects

- Bladder and back passage irritation
- Changes to your bowel habits (constipation or diarrhoea)
- Skin irritation and rashes
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Loss of hair in genital area

### Possible late side-effects

- Blood in your urine or bowel motions. Your bladder or bowel may be permanently affected
- Narrowing of the vagina
- Effects on ability to have erections (erectile dysfunction)
- Infertility



If you feel unwell or have any other side-effects or symptoms – during or at any time after treatment – tell your doctor, nurse or radiation therapist. For more on side-effects and ways to cope, see page 89, or go to [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) for information and advice.

For more information on radiotherapy and its side-effects, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. Ask for a copy of the booklet *Understanding Radiotherapy* or download it from our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

### After radiotherapy

After radiotherapy for bladder cancer, you will need close follow-up. This is to make sure the cancer does not come back. You will need to have regular checks of your bladder after your radiotherapy. If the cancer does come back, your bladder might need to be removed.



## After treatment

After your cancer treatment has ended you will still need regular check-ups. This is called follow-up. The follow-up may involve having a physical exam, blood tests and scans. If your bladder was not surgically removed, it will be checked regularly.

At first these visits to the specialist will be quite often, sometimes every 3 months. The visits will continue for a number of years but will gradually become less frequent.

Tell your doctor or nurse how you have been since your last appointment. Remember to tell them about any new symptoms, aches or pains you have, or if you are finding it hard to cope.

It can help to write down what you want to say before you see the doctor. That way you won't forget anything.

It's important to go to your follow-up appointments. They give your doctor the chance to:

- Help with any side-effects you may have
- Check for signs of new side-effects that may develop after you have finished treatment
- Check for signs of the cancer coming back (recurrence)

It is better to be aware of these as early as possible so that suitable treatment can be given.

If you are between check-ups and have a symptom or problem that is worrying you, call your specialist nurse for advice or to arrange an earlier outpatient appointment if necessary.

If you become suddenly unwell and can't contact your specialist nurse or hospital team, go to your GP or the emergency department at the hospital.

### What if the cancer comes back?

If cancer comes back, it can often be treated again. Your cancer doctor will advise you on what your treatment options are.



## Treatment for advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer

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## How is advanced (metastatic) bladder cancer treated?

If the cancer spreads to another part of your body, for example the liver, lungs or bones, it is called metastatic, advanced or secondary cancer. Your cancer may be in more than one part of your body when it is first diagnosed. If your cancer has spread it can still be treated. Treatment is usually to try to control the cancer rather than to cure it. You may also have treatment to improve any symptoms you have.



There are a range of treatment options for metastatic bladder cancer and new treatments are being developed all the time.

Often metastatic cancer is treated with chemotherapy or other cancer drugs. There may also be treatments that you can have as part of a clinical trial (see page 39).

## Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy for advanced bladder cancer can often slow its growth and keep it under control for some time. Examples of drugs used for advanced bladder cancer include gemcitabine and cisplatin.

Chemotherapy can cause side-effects, so your doctor may advise less intensive chemotherapy or a different treatment, depending on your age and general health.

**For more about chemotherapy, including how it is given and possible side-effects, please see page 54.**

## Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy drugs encourage the immune system to recognise and help destroy cancer cells. A new group of drugs called checkpoint inhibitors can be used when the cancer is locally advanced or advanced. For example, pembrolizumab and atezolizumab. Your oncologist will advise you if they think immunotherapy drugs are suitable for you.



Other types of checkpoint immunotherapy drugs may become available soon. Clinical trials are testing whether combining newer checkpoint immunotherapy drugs with chemotherapy and radiation therapy will benefit people with bladder cancer.

Common side-effects include:

- Feeling tired
- Skin changes
- Feeling sick
- Diarrhoea
- Feeling short of breath

Because of the way immunotherapy drugs work, they can cause the immune system to attack other parts of the body. This is not common, but it can cause serious side-effects in the lungs, other organs or glands that make certain hormones. Sometimes the treatment needs to be stopped. It is important to tell your doctor or nurse about any side-effects you have, even after you have stopped having treatment.



Thanks to recent advances in research and treatments, many people are living longer with metastatic cancer and with a better quality of life.

## Surgery

Surgery for advanced bladder cancer is usually to improve symptoms.

### TURBT surgery

You may have a TURBT procedure to remove as much cancer as possible from your bladder. This is to stop any bleeding and relieve pressure in your bladder from the cancer, which can make it hard to pee. It may also slow the spread of the cancer.

### Surgery to unblock your kidneys or your ureters (tubes that connect your kidneys to your bladder)

Sometimes the cancer can block your ureters or kidneys. If this happens, urine (pee), can build up in the kidneys and stop them from working properly.

There are 2 ways doctors can help with blockages:

#### Stents

The doctor puts a small tube called a stent into the ureter, to keep it open, so that the urine can flow properly. The stent is put in through your urethra – the tube that brings urine out of your body.

#### Nephrostomy tube

The doctor puts a tube through your skin. The urine passes through the tube into a bag on the outside of your body.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy can control advanced bladder cancer and help with symptoms, such as bleeding in your bladder or bone pain.

Radiotherapy given to improve symptoms and help you to feel better is sometimes called palliative radiotherapy. Often with palliative radiotherapy you will have a single dose or a short course of treatments.

Any side-effects affect the part of the body that is treated. With a short course of radiotherapy, you may not have any side-effects or side-effects may be less severe than with a longer course.

**For more about radiotherapy, including possible side-effects, please see page 75.**

### Palliative care



Palliative care helps you to manage your symptoms and improve your quality of life. Palliative care includes end-of-life care, but your doctor may also recommend palliative care to manage symptoms and complications earlier in your illness.

Palliative care includes physical, psychosocial and spiritual care. The team can include specially trained doctors, nurses, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, complementary therapists, chaplains and counsellors. Palliative care can be arranged by your family doctor (GP), public health nurse or by the hospital. Palliative care is a free service for all patients with advanced cancer. Palliative care teams work both in hospitals and in the community and sometimes visit patients at home. They may work along with your treating team.



## Managing side-effects and symptoms

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## How can I cope with fatigue?

Fatigue means feeling extremely tired. Fatigue is very common with cancer. Usually fatigue starts to improve once treatment is over, but it can carry on for some people. Tell your doctor or nurse if fatigue is affecting you, so that they can help you.

Fatigue when you have cancer can be caused by many things, including:

- The cancer itself
- Tests and treatments for cancer
- Not eating well
- Low levels of red blood cells (due to the cancer or its treatment)
- Dealing with difficult emotions and feeling anxious or depressed
- Not sleeping well
- Symptoms like pain, breathlessness or fluid retention



Finding out what is causing your fatigue makes it easier to treat. For example, if you have a low red blood cell count, a transfusion can make you feel better. If you are not eating well, a dietitian may be able to give you some advice to help you.

## Hints and tips: Fatigue



- **Ask your doctor about exercising.** Being active can help with fatigue. Your doctor may also be able to recommend an exercise programme for you.
- **Plan your days.** Get to know when your energy levels tend to be better. You may have to decide which tasks are important to finish and do them over the course of the day or when you have most energy.
- **Ask for help at work or at home** with any jobs that you find tiring.
- **Try to eat a well-balanced diet.** Eat little and often if your appetite is poor. Our booklet *Diet and Cancer* has tips to help.
- **Try to avoid stress.** Talk to friends and family about any worries you have and take time to enjoy yourself. Counselling may help too (see page 106).
- **If you are not sleeping well, have a good bedtime routine and try relaxation techniques.** Avoid stimulants like caffeine and alcohol in the evening and try not to use electronic devices for an hour before bedtime.
- **Short naps (less than an hour) and rest periods can be helpful,** as long as they don't stop you from sleeping at night.
- **Try complementary therapies** like meditation, acupuncture or massage, if your doctor says they're safe for you.

Our booklet *Coping with Fatigue* has more advice. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre for a free copy. It's also on our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

## Will treatment affect my sex life?

Cancer can affect how you feel about sex and your relationships. Coming to terms with the fact that you have cancer can take quite a while. You may have concerns about how your partner will react if you have a urostomy or other changes to the way your body looks.

It can be hard to relax as well when you have a lot of worries on your mind. You may also be feeling tired from the effects of treatment and lose interest in sex as a result.

There is no right or wrong way to feel about your sexuality and sex life. Even if you do not feel like having sex, you can still enjoy a close and loving relationship with your partner. Touching and holding each other can help you to stay physically close.



You may find that talking about your feelings may ease any worries you have. If you find it hard to express your feelings to your partner or a close friend, talk to your doctor or nurse. Our Support Line 1800 200 700 and our Daffodil Centres can help you to find supportive information and accredited therapists if you would like to talk to someone. Therapy can help you and your partner deal with a change in your sexual relationship and find ways of being close again.



There is no set time for you to be ready to have sex again. It varies from person to person. Your doctor will advise if you can have sex while on radiotherapy. Your doctor will advise you on medications you may need to have sex after surgery.

For more information on sexual side-effects of cystectomy surgery for muscle-invasive bladder cancer, see page 69.

Some people fear that cancer can be passed on to a partner during sex. There is no truth to this.

### Asking for advice

If you have any questions about how treatment may affect your sex life, you can ask your doctor or nurse. Your doctor and nurse are well used to talking about these matters, so try not to feel embarrassed. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to discuss any worries you might have with a cancer nurse in confidence. Or email the nurses at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

### Contraception

If you are having sex and you are fertile, you should use a reliable method of contraception during and for some time after treatment. Some chemotherapy and other cancer drugs may harm a developing baby, so it's important to avoid pregnancy during and for a time after treatment.

Many specialists recommend that you wait for up to 2 years after treatment before trying to start a family or having more children. This time gives your body a chance to recover from the effects of the cancer and its treatment.

Ask your doctor's advice about contraception or if you are thinking about having children after treatment.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Will treatment affect my fertility?

Your fertility may be affected by some of the treatments so that you may not be able to have a child in the future. Discuss any worries you have about infertility with your doctor before treatment starts. He or she can tell you if there are any options open to you. For example, it may be possible to freeze your eggs or sperm before treatment begins. Your doctor can refer you to a specialist fertility clinic for advice, counselling and support if this is an option for you.

Dealing with infertility can bring feelings of sadness, anger and loss of identity. It can help to talk through your concerns with someone who is a good listener or with a professional counsellor. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre for information and support from a cancer nurse.



## Cancer and complementary therapies

Complementary therapies are treatments and activities that you can have along with your standard medical treatment to try and feel better. For example, massage, counselling and aromatherapy.

Complementary therapies can't treat or cure cancer, but some people say that complementary therapies help them to feel more relaxed and better able to cope with their cancer and the side-effects of treatment.

It's very important to talk to your doctor if you're thinking of using complementary therapies. Tell them also if you're using or considering using over-the-counter or herbal medications. Some can interfere with your treatment or be harmful to you, even if you have used them safely before your cancer diagnosis.

## Integrative care

Integrative care means combining (integrating) your standard cancer treatment with complementary therapies to try to feel as well as possible and to cope better with your cancer.

### What's the difference between complementary and alternative therapies?

Complementary therapies are used **together with** standard medical treatment.

Alternative therapies are used **instead of** standard medical care.

Modern medical treatments are very effective at curing cancer and keeping it under control. An unproven alternative could harm your health, or you might miss out on a treatment that could really help you.

### More information

To find out more about complementary therapies, you can talk to one of our cancer nurses - call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. You can also ask for a free copy of our booklet *Understanding cancer and complementary therapies*, or download it from our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

## After treatment

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## Life after treatment

It can take some time to adjust to life after cancer treatment. It isn't unusual to feel quite low and lost after your treatment has ended, especially during the first few months.

Feelings you may have include:

- **Fear of cancer coming back** and worrying about every small symptom
- **Loneliness** without the company and support of your medical team and fellow patients
- **Stress** at having to deal with things that may have been on hold during your treatment, such as your finances, going back to work and family issues
- **Isolation or guilt** if your family and friends expect you to get back to normal before you are ready
- **Anxiety and self-doubt** about sexual and romantic relationships
- **Anger** at what has happened and the effect on you and your loved ones
- **Depression or sadness**

There is more about how to cope with these feelings and adjusting to life after cancer on our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)



## After-treatment workshops

You might like to join our **Life and Cancer – Enhancing Survivorship (LACES)** programme when you have completed treatment or have commenced maintenance therapy. This workshop covers topics such as diet, exercise, wellbeing, finance and self-management and gives information on support and services to help you. Call our Support Line or visit a Daffodil Centre for details.

You can also call our Support Line or visit a Daffodil Centre to talk to a cancer nurse in confidence. See page 107 for other ways to get emotional support. Ask the nurses for a copy of our booklet *Life after Cancer*, which has advice on living well – physically and emotionally.

## Living a healthy lifestyle

Having a healthy lifestyle is important as it can help you to:

- Feel better
- Heal and recover faster
- Cope better with any side-effects
- Keep up your energy and strength
- Reduce your risk of further illness

A healthy lifestyle includes:

- Exercising
- Eating well
- Not smoking
- Avoiding alcohol
- Protecting yourself from the sun

It's also important to have any vaccines recommended for you. For example, flu and pneumonia. Some vaccinations may not be suitable if you've had cancer treatment, so check with your doctor which you should have and make sure you get them.

If you want more information or advice, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. You can also go to our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) for tips and publications on healthy living.

If you would like advice or support to stop smoking, call the HSE Quit Team on CallSave 1800 201 203, visit [www.QUIT.ie](http://www.QUIT.ie) or Freetext QUIT to 50100.

## Planning ahead

Many people find it puts their mind at rest to have medical plans in place and sort out legal and practical matters, even though they still hope to live for a long time. Planning ahead is useful for everyone, whether they have an illness or not.

Planning ahead might include:

- Thinking about how you feel about different types of medical treatment, including if you want to stop treatment at any stage or carry on for as long as possible.
- Writing an advance care directive. This is where you can write down your wishes about your medical care. Doctors can use this if you are not well enough to say what you want.
- Picking someone to make medical decisions for you if you are not well enough.
- Making a will.
- Talking about what you want to your family, friends, carers and healthcare providers.
- Sorting financial affairs.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Who can help me plan?

*Think Ahead* is a planning pack with different sections and easy-to-read forms. You can fill in your personal, medical, financial and legal information and preferences. It's available from the Irish Hospice Foundation at [www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)



## Coping and emotions

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## How can I cope with my feelings?

Some people say that trying to cope with their thoughts and feelings is the hardest part of having cancer.

You may find it hard to come to terms with your diagnosis, you may blame yourself, resent other people who are healthy or feel very anxious or depressed.



Feelings like sadness, fear, grief, hopelessness, anxiety and anger can happen at different times, sometimes months or years after treatment.

A helpful booklet that discusses in detail how you may be feeling is called *Understanding the Emotional Effects of Cancer*. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre for a free copy.

*A cancer diagnosis can be hard on you - mentally and emotionally. Give yourself time and space to deal with your emotions and get help if you need it.*

## Anxiety and depression

If you feel that anxiety or low moods are getting the better of you or you're finding it hard to cope, it's important to get help. Try to talk with someone you know who is a good listener, join a support group or tell your GP. Medical social workers can also offer support to you and your family.

Your doctor may also suggest medication to help with anxiety or depression. Often a short course of medication can work well. Professional counselling can also be very helpful.

*It's not a sign of failure to ask for help or to feel unable to cope on your own.*

## Counselling

If you're feeling very distressed or finding it hard to cope, a trained counsellor who is not involved in your situation can help you to express your feelings, worries and fears and make sense of them. Counselling can also give you emotional support, help you to make decisions and learn ways to cope better.

The Irish Cancer Society funds free one-to-one counselling through many local cancer support centres. To find out more about counselling call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. Or email the nurses at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

A list of counsellors funded by the Irish Cancer Society is available at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

'Talking about cancer made it less awful and helped ease my fears. I learned to cope and understand myself better.'

## Ways to get emotional support



**Find out about cancer support services in your area:** Most provide a range of helpful services like counselling, complementary therapies, exercise programmes and other activities. They can also give you practical advice and support. See page 130 for more about cancer support services.

**Join a support or educational group:** You might find it reassuring to talk to other people with cancer who are facing similar challenges. Many cancer support centres have activities and groups where you can meet other people affected by cancer.

**Ask about psycho-oncology services at the hospital:** Psycho-oncology services give cancer patients emotional and psychological support to help them cope. Your healthcare team can refer you to psycho-oncology services if they're available at your hospital.

**Get online support:** Special websites called online communities let you write questions, share stories, and give and receive advice and support. Visit [www.cancer.ie/community](http://www.cancer.ie/community) to join the Irish Cancer Society online community.

**Talk things through:** It can be a great weight off your mind to share your feelings and worries. You could talk to a friend or family member if you feel comfortable doing so. You could also speak to the medical social worker at the hospital or to one of our cancer nurses.

**Seek spiritual support:** For some people spiritual and religious beliefs can bring comfort and hope. Practices such as prayer or meditation may help you to focus on what has value and meaning in your life.

## Peer Support



Peer Support is the Irish Cancer Society's one-to-one support programme. You can be put in contact with a trained volunteer who has dealt with a cancer diagnosis. Volunteers give support, practical information and reassurance. Call 1800 200 700 for more information or visit a Daffodil Centre.

**If you need more information or help with finding support, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or drop into a Daffodil Centre.**



### Positive feelings

In time, some people say they can find positive things in their cancer experience. They say that cancer brought them closer to the people around them or made them appreciate what's important in life. Or it opened up new experiences and relationships. Getting support, such as counselling, may help you to come to terms with your diagnosis and feel more positive.

## You and your family

Every family deals with cancer in its own way. You may feel that you don't want your illness to upset family life, feel guilty that you can't join in as much as before, or that you're letting down your partner or children. You may also worry about the emotional impact your illness will have on your loved ones. Our booklet *Understanding the Emotional Effects of Cancer* can help you find ways to talk about your cancer and to ask for the help and support you need.

If you or your family members need more support or advice, speak to the medical social worker at the hospital or get in touch with one of our cancer nurses. Call us on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre. The nurses can also support you if you have children and aren't sure what to say to them. You could also read our booklet *Talking to Children about Cancer*, which has practical advice about how to talk to children of different ages.



## Changing relationships

You may feel that people are treating you differently. Some people may withdraw and not contact you as much because they are afraid of doing or saying the wrong thing. Others may not understand that you feel too unwell to go out. Try to talk openly to your friends and family if there are any misunderstandings or problems. Tell them how you feel. If you find it hard, ask another family member or friend to talk to them.





## Supporting someone with cancer

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## Supporting someone with cancer



Finding out someone you love has cancer and trying to care for them can be difficult. You might be unsure about how best to support the person with cancer, practically or emotionally. You might also be struggling with your own feelings and responsibilities.

Here are some things that can help to make life a little easier:

### **Learn about cancer**

Try to go to hospital visits and also read any information from the hospital so you can understand your loved one's illness and treatment, how it might affect them, physically and emotionally, and how you can best support them. Visit our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) or call our Support Line for free copies of our cancer information booklets.

### **Share worries**

If you are feeling anxious or overwhelmed, share your worries with someone else. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or drop into a Daffodil Centre if you want to chat to a cancer nurse in confidence.

## Be kind to yourself

Your health and happiness matter too. Make some time for yourself, stay in touch with your friends and don't be afraid to let other people help out with the caring.

## Try counselling

You might find it helpful to talk to a counsellor. The Irish Cancer Society funds free one-to-one counselling for friends and family members through many local cancer support centres. Talk to your GP or see page 106.

## Find out about support for carers

Find out about groups and organisations especially for carers of people with cancer. Many local cancer support centres have services for carers too.

## How to talk to someone with cancer



When someone close to you has cancer it can be hard to know what to say. You may find it difficult to talk about their cancer. Or you may be afraid of saying the wrong thing. Often what people with cancer want most is someone to listen to them.

If you want advice on how to support a friend or loved one with cancer, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700. Ask for a copy of our booklet *Caring for Someone with Cancer*. The booklet gives advice on talking to someone with cancer. It also has tips to help you to feel more confident about supporting your friend or relative. You can also pick up a copy of the booklet at any Daffodil Centre, or download it at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

## Support for you



Our cancer nurses are there to support you. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700, visit a Daffodil Centre or email [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie) for confidential support, advice and information.

Our booklet, *Caring for Someone with Cancer* has lots of information on:

- Getting organised
- Managing and giving medications
- Giving personal care
- Practical and money matters
- Relationships with other people
- Looking after yourself
- Life after caring

Free copies are available from our Daffodil Centres or the Support Line, or download it from our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)



Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700



## Support resources

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## Money matters

- If you have cancer you may not be able to work for a time. You may also have extra expenses.
  - You may have to pay for some of your cancer treatment.
  - You might be entitled to certain social welfare payments.
  - There are services to help you if you're finding it hard to manage.

A diagnosis of cancer often means that you will have extra expenses, such as car parking during hospital visits, medication, travel, heating and childcare costs. If you can't work or you are unemployed, this may cause even more stress. It may be harder for you to deal with cancer if you are worried about money.

### Practical and financial advice from the Irish Cancer Society



We provide individualised financial and practical advice for people living with cancer. This includes:

- **Understanding your welfare entitlements**
- **Advice on accessing extra childcare**
- **Telling your boss about your diagnosis**
- **Public supports**
- **Community supports**
- **Legal entitlements**

We can also act as advocates for patients and their families, for example when discussing your diagnosis with your employer or your financial provider.

Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to access any of these supports.

## Medical expenses

Medical expenses that you might have to pay include:

- Visits to your family doctor (GP)
- Visits to hospital
- Medicines
- Medical aids and equipment (appliances), like wigs

How much you pay towards your medical expenses depends on whether or not you qualify for a medical card and what type of health insurance you have, if any.

**If you have a medical card**, you will probably have very little to pay for hospital and GP (family doctor) care or your medication. If you are over 70, you can get a free GP visit card.

Medical cards are usually for people on low incomes, but sometimes a card can be given even if your income is above the limit. For example, if you have a large amount of medical expenses. This is known as a discretionary medical card.

An emergency medical card may be issued if you are terminally ill and in palliative care, irrespective of your income.

**If you don't have a medical card** you will have to pay some of the cost of your care and medication.

**If you have health insurance**, the insurance company will pay some of the costs, but the amount will depend on your insurance plan. It's important to contact your insurance company before starting tests or treatment to check you're covered.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)

## Benefits and allowances

There are benefits that can help people who are ill and their family. For example, Illness Benefit, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Leave.

If you want more information on benefits and allowances, contact:

- **The medical social worker** in the hospital you are attending
- **Citizens Information** – Tel: 0818 074 000
- **Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection** – Tel: 0818 662 244 or ask to speak to a DSP representative at your local health centre or DSP office.

Always have your PPS number to hand when you are asking about entitlements and benefits. It's also a good idea to keep a copy of completed forms, so take a photo or photocopy them before posting.



## If you have money problems

If you are getting into debt or you are in debt, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) can help you. MABS can look at your situation, work out your budget, help you to deal with your debts and manage your payments. The service is free and confidential. Call the MABS Helpline 0818 07 2000 for information.

If you are finding it hard to cope financially, contact your medical social worker in the hospital or your local health centre for advice. The Irish Cancer Society can also give some help towards travel costs in certain cases. See page 127 for more details of our Volunteer Driver Service and the Travel2Care fund.

You can also call our Support Line 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre and the nurse will suggest ways to help you manage.

## Money and finances

Go to [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) and see our **Managing money** page for information on:

- **Medical costs and help available**
- **Benefits and allowances that you or your family may qualify for**
- **Travel services**
- **Ways to cope with the cost of cancer**

Our Benefits Hub on our website has lots of information on government supports for people who are unwell and their carers. It also has advice on how to apply.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Irish Cancer Society services

Our Cancer Support Department provides a range of cancer support services for people with cancer, at home and in hospital, including:

- **Support Line**
- **Daffodil Centres**
- **Telephone interpreting service**
- **Peer Support**
- **Psychological support services**
- **Patient travel and financial grants**
- **Night nursing**
- **Publications and website information**
- **Support in your area**
- **Practical support and financial solution services (see page 119)**

## Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Call our Support Line and speak to one of our cancer nurses for confidential advice, support and information for anyone affected by cancer. Our Support Line is open Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm.

The Support Line service also offers video calls for those who want a face-to-face chat with one of our cancer nurses. From the comfort of your own home, you can meet a cancer nurse online and receive confidential advice, support and information on any aspect of cancer.

Our cancer nurses are available Monday to Friday to take video calls on the Microsoft Teams platform. To avail of the service, please go to <https://www.cancer.ie/Support-Line-Video-Form>

You can also email us any time on [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie) or visit our Online Community at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie).



## Daffodil Centres

Daffodil Centres in 13 hospitals nationwide are staffed by cancer nurses and trained volunteers. They provide face-to-face advice, support and information to anyone affected by cancer. The service is free and confidential.



This is a walk-in service. For opening hours and contact details for each of the Daffodil Centres, go to [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) and search 'Daffodil Centres'. You can also email [daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie](mailto:daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie)

## Who can use the Daffodil Centres?

Daffodil Centres are open to everyone – you don't need an appointment. Just call in if you want to talk or need information on any aspect of cancer including:

- Cancer treatments and side-effects
- Chemotherapy group education sessions
- Emotional support
- Practical entitlements and services
- Living with and beyond cancer
- End-of-life services
- Lifestyle and cancer prevention
- Local cancer support groups and centres

## Telephone Interpreting Service

Speak to our Support Line and Daffodil Centre nurses in your own language through our telephone interpreting service.

Call Freephone 1800 200 700 or visit a cancer nurse in a Daffodil Centre and we will connect you to an interpreter.

## Peer Support Programme

Peer Support is a free and confidential telephone service connecting people with similar cancer experiences. Peer Support volunteers are fully trained to provide emotional and practical cancer support in a safe, responsible and kind way.



To be referred to a Peer Support volunteer, call Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Email: [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)



## Psychological support services

The Society funds professional one-to-one counselling. The services we provide are:

- **Remote counselling nationwide** by telephone or video call.
- **In-person counselling sessions** in cancer support centres around the country.

Counselling is available for the patient, family members and close friends.

For more information, call Freephone 1800 200 700, or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

## Support in your area

We work with local cancer support centres and the National Cancer Control Programme to ensure cancer patients and their families have access to high-quality, confidential support in a location that's convenient to them.

For more information about what's available near you, contact your nearest Daffodil Centre, or call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700.



## Patient travel and financial grants

We provide patient travel and financial grants for patients in need who are in cancer treatment.

- The Irish Cancer Society **Volunteer Driver Service** is available mainly to patients undergoing chemotherapy treatments in our partner hospitals who are having difficulty getting to and from their local appointments.
- We have recently opened a pilot service for radiotherapy patients attending University Hospital Cork and the Bons, Cork for treatment.
- **Travel2Care** is a fund for patients who are having difficulty getting to and from their diagnostic test appointments or cancer treatments. Patients can apply for this fund if they are travelling over 50 kilometres one way to a national designated cancer centre or satellite. Travel2Care is made available by the National Cancer Control Programme.

To access any of these supports, please contact your hospital healthcare professional, call Freephone 1800 200 700, or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.



## Irish Cancer Society Night Nursing

We provide end-of-life care for cancer patients in their own homes. We offer up to 10 nights of care for each patient. Our service allows patients to remain at home for the last days of their lives surrounded by their families and loved ones. This is a unique service in Ireland, providing palliative nursing care at night between 11pm and 7am to cancer patients.



The health professional who is looking after your loved one can request a night nurse for you, so talk to your palliative care team member, GP or public health nurse about this.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Publications and website information

We provide information on a range of topics, including cancer types, treatments and side-effects and coping with cancer. Visit our website [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) to see our full range of information and download copies. You can also Freephone our Support Line or call into your nearest Daffodil Centre for a free copy of any of our publications.



To find out more about the Irish Cancer Society's services and programmes:

- Visit us at [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)
- Call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700
- Email our Support Line at [supportline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:supportline@irishcancer.ie)
- Contact your nearest Daffodil Centre
- Follow us on Facebook
- Follow us on Twitter
- Follow us on Instagram

## Local cancer support services

The Irish Cancer Society works with cancer support services all over Ireland. They have a range of services for cancer patients, their partners, families and carers, during and after treatment, many of which are free. For example:

- **Professional counselling** (the Irish Cancer Society funds free one-to-one counselling through many local support services)
- **Support groups**, often led by professionals like social workers, counsellors, psychologists or cancer nurses
- **Special exercise programmes**
- **Stress management and relaxation techniques**, such as mindfulness and meditation
- **Complementary therapies** like massage, reflexology and acupuncture
- **Specialist services** such as prosthesis or wig fitting and lymphoedema services, such as education, exercise, self-management and manual lymph drainage
- **Mind and body sessions**, for example, yoga and tai chi
- **Expressive therapies** such as creative writing and art
- **Free Irish Cancer Society publications** and other high-quality, trustworthy information on a range of topics

Cancer support services usually have a drop-in service where you can call in for a cup of tea and find out what's available.

You can call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 to find your nearest cancer support centre. Or go to [www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie) and search 'Find support'.



## What does that word mean?

**Abdomen:** The part of your body between your chest and hipbones. Also known as your tummy.

**Adjuvant treatment:** Treatment for cancer given soon after surgery.

**Alopecia:** Loss of hair where you normally have hair.

**Benign:** Not cancer. A tumour that does not spread.

**Biopsy:** Removing a small amount of tissue from your bladder to find out if abnormal cells are present.

**Catheter:** A thin flexible tube that drains urine from your bladder.

**Chemotherapy:** A treatment that uses drugs to cure or control cancer.

**Cystoscopy:** A test that uses a thin flexible tube with a light at one end to look inside your bladder.

**Invasive bladder cancer:** Cancer that has spread into the muscle layer of your bladder.

**Malignant:** Cancer.

**Metastasis:** The spread of cancer from one part of your body to other tissues and organs.

**Pelvis:** The lower part of your abdomen found between your hipbones. It contains your bladder and bowels as well as lymph glands. In women it also contains the womb and ovaries. In men it contains the prostate gland.

**Radiotherapy:** A treatment that uses high-energy X-rays to cure or control cancer and other diseases.

**Staging:** Finding out the size and extent of cancer.

**Stoma:** An artificial opening on the surface of your abdomen. See also urostomy.

**Transitional cells:** Cells in the lining of your bladder.

**Urethra:** The tube through which you pass urine. Also known as the water pipe.

**Ureter:** The tube that drains urine from your kidneys to your bladder.

**Urostomy:** An opening onto the surface of your abdomen. Part of your bowel is used to drain urine after your bladder has been removed. A bag is worn over the opening to collect the urine. It is also called an ileal conduit.



Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

## Questions to ask your doctor

Here is a list of questions that you might like to ask. Never be shy about asking questions. It is always better to ask than to worry.

How long will it take to get the test results?

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What type of bladder cancer do I have?

---

What stage is my cancer at?

---

What treatment will I need?

---

Will surgery cure my cancer?

---

Are there other treatment options? Why is this one best for me?

---

Would I be suitable for a clinical trial?

---

How long will my treatment take?

---

Do I have to stay in hospital for my treatment?

---

What side-effects or after-effects will I get?

---

Is there anything I can do to help myself during treatment?

---

Will treatment affect my sex life?

---

Will I be able to have children?

---

How often will I need check-ups?

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## Notes/questions

## Acknowledgments

This booklet has been produced by the Irish Cancer Society to meet the need for improved communication, information and support for cancer patients and their families throughout diagnosis and treatment. We would like to thank all those patients, families and professionals whose support and advice made this publication possible.

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- *Guidelines on Non Muscle-Invasive Bladder Cancer (Ta, T1, and CIS)*, European Association of Urology, 2023.
- *National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026*, National Cancer Control Programme
- *Cancer in Ireland 1994-2020 with estimates for 2017-2019: Annual report of the National Cancer Registry (2021)*
- *Cancer Nursing: Principles and Practice*, CH Yarbro, Wujcik, Holmes Gobe, 8th Ed (2016).
- *The Chemotherapy Source Book*, M Perry, Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2012.

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## Join the Irish Cancer Society team

If you want to make a difference to people affected by cancer, join our team!

### Support people affected by cancer

Reaching out directly to people with cancer is one of the most rewarding ways to help:

- Help people needing lifts to hospital by becoming a volunteer driver
- Give one-on-one support to someone newly diagnosed with cancer as part of our Peer Support programme
- Give information and support to people concerned about or affected by cancer at one of our hospital-based Daffodil Centres

### Share your experiences

Use your voice to bring reassurance to cancer patients and their families, help people to connect with our services or inspire them to get involved as a volunteer:

- Share your cancer story
- Tell people about our services
- Describe what it's like to organise or take part in a fundraising event

### Raise money

All our services are funded by the public's generosity:

- Donate direct
- Take part in one of our fundraising events or challenges
- Organise your own event

Contact our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 if you want to get involved!

### Did you like this booklet?

We would love to hear your comments or suggestions.

Please email [reviewers@irishcancer.ie](mailto:reviewers@irishcancer.ie)

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