

# WHAT IS CANCER? THE FACTS

## Links to the National Curriculum:

PSHE/PSD/Health and Wellbeing, Science, English.

Links can also be made to the *Every Child Matters Outcomes Framework 2008*.

## Resources

- Copies of the resource sheets **What is cancer?** and **Have you got the facts?**

## Objectives

- To understand the facts about cancer

## Introduction

Start by asking pupils to share what they know, or think they know, about cancer. This could be done through a question and answer session or by pupils writing down anything they know about cancer. Include feelings, facts they know, or an opinion. It could start 'Cancer is ...'. Discuss their lists.

## Main activity

Hand out copies of the **What is cancer?** resource sheet. Read through and ask pupils to underline any facts that aren't already on their lists. Discuss any words or sentences pupils aren't sure of and correct any misconceptions. Try to ensure pupils understand these key messages:

- You can't catch cancer from anyone else.
- No one knows exactly why some people get cancer and others don't.
- You can reduce the risk of getting cancer by making healthy lifestyle choices.
- People don't always die if they get cancer. In fact more and more people are surviving cancer.
- Cancer mostly affects people over the age of 65. Childhood cancer is very rare, and most children who are diagnosed with cancer survive.

Hand out the **Have you got the facts?** resource sheet. Ask pupils to use what they have learnt so far to complete the quiz individually or in pairs.

Discuss what new cancer facts pupils have learnt. Do they find any of the information surprising? Which facts do they think are the most important for other young people to know? Pupils could design information posters or leaflets to inform other young people about cancer. Further information about cancer and where to go for support can be found at [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

The correct answers to the **Have you got the facts?** quiz are:

1. **a.** cells  
**b.** tumour  
**c.** leukaemia  
**d.** biopsy
2. **b.** Over 200
3. **b.** False. Cancer is not contagious.
4. **a.** Surgery  
**b.** Radiotherapy  
**c.** Chemotherapy
5. **b.** False. It's the side effects of some cancer treatments that can cause hair loss. It nearly always grows back.

## Follow up work

Ask pupils to suggest ways they could help people with cancer, perhaps through fundraising or holding a special awareness-raising event.

Follow this session with the **How can I stay fit and healthy?** lesson plan so pupils can use information from both sessions to devise a mini health campaign.

For further advice to help you teach about cancer, and to order your free *Cancertalk* teaching pack, visit [macmillan.org.uk/schools](http://macmillan.org.uk/schools)

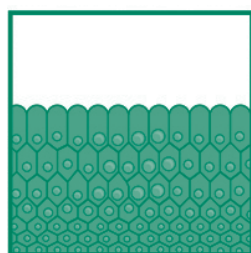
# WHAT IS CANCER?

## THE FACTS

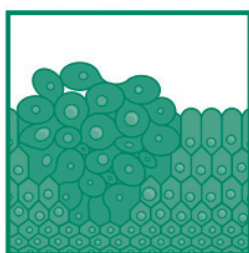
Although we use just the one word, cancer is actually many different illnesses. Cancer can occur in any part of the body. There are over 200 different types of cancer.

### How does cancer develop?

Every part of our body is made up of tiny building blocks called cells. Cancer is an illness of these cells. The cells in our body divide to help us grow or to replace damaged cells. Normally they divide in a controlled way, but this process can go wrong producing cancer cells that divide in an uncontrolled way. These cancer cells can then crowd out healthy cells and may spread to other parts of the body.



Normal cells



Cells forming a tumour

### There are two main types of cancer:

#### 1 Solid cancers

These form when cancer cells crowd out healthy cells, forming a lump or tumour. Many types of cancer take this form.

#### 2 Leukaemia and lymphomas

These are cancers that affect white blood cells and are often called cancers of the blood. They affect the body's ability to fight disease. Sometimes they are only diagnosed after a routine blood test.

### Tests for cancer

There are lots of different tests that are used to find out if someone has cancer. These include blood tests, scans or even having an operation to remove part of a lump to see if it is cancerous (a procedure called a biopsy).

### What are the treatments?

Depending on the type of cancer and what stage it is at when diagnosed, treatments can be very successful.

There are three commonly used treatments:

#### 1 Surgery

is sometimes necessary. Surgeons may need to operate to remove a tumour. Surgery is often accompanied by other treatments such as radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy.

**2 Radiotherapy** involves exposing cancers to a type of radiation over a short period of time. The area affected by cancer is exposed to radioactive rays in much the same way that an ordinary X-ray is used to view a broken limb. Radiotherapy can kill cancer cells and reduce the size of tumours.

**3 Chemotherapy** involves taking powerful drugs that can be swallowed or given directly into a vein. The drugs are sometimes given in one go or slowly over a longer period of time.

Radiotherapy and chemotherapy are designed to damage any cells (including cancer cells) that are rapidly dividing. Unfortunately, it means they can also destroy good cells. This is what causes side effects such as sickness, tiredness or hair loss. But side effects always wear off after the treatment is finished, and any hair lost will nearly always grow back.

# HAVE YOU GOT THE FACTS?

Try to complete the short quiz below. For more information about cancer, and to find out where to go if you need support, check out the Macmillan website [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

## 1. Choose the correct word to fill in the below.

tumour  
cells  
biopsy  
leukaemia

- a. Cancer is a disease of the \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Solid cancers occur when cancer cells form a lump or \_\_\_\_\_ which crowds out healthy cells.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ is a cancer of the white blood cells.
- d. Doctors can tell if a lump is cancerous or not by removing part of it. This is called a \_\_\_\_\_.

## 2. How many different cancers are there?

- a. Over 10
- b. Over 200
- c. Over 2,000

## 3. You can catch cancer from someone who has it.

- a. True
- b. False

## 4. Name the three main ways cancer can be treated.

- a. S \_\_\_\_\_
- b. C \_\_\_\_\_
- c. R \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Cancer causes hair to fall out.

- a. True.
- b. False.