

A-Z of Terminology

Adenoma: a tumour or polyp which is benign but can change over time to become cancerous

Adjuvant chemotherapy: treatment given to patients after surgery has removed their primary tumour

Anaemia: a reduced number of red blood cells and/or levels of haemoglobin (the pigment in the blood which carries oxygen)

Anus: the opening at the lower end of the bowel through which stools are passed

Barium enema: a radio-opaque fluid given in enema form and used to outline the colon by x-ray

Biopsy: small piece of tissue taken from an area of the body to be examined under a microscope

Blood test: a small amount of blood drawn from the patient for analysis which can help detect a wide range of health problems

Bolus injection: the administration of a drug in a single large injection. Chemotherapy is sometimes administered with a bolus injection

Bowels: another name for the intestines - these consist of the small bowel (duodenum, jejunum and ileum) and the large bowel (colon and rectum)

Cancer: abnormal and uncontrolled division of cells that invade and destroy surrounding tissue

Chemoembolisation: a medical procedure where the supply of blood to a tumour is blocked. This process starves the tumour of oxygen and nutrients, and allows a high concentration of anticancer drugs to be in direct contact with it

Chemotherapy: the treatment of cancer by drugs which stop cancer cells from dividing and spreading

Central Venous Catheter: a catheter placed into a large vein in the neck or chest used to administer medication, fluids or to take blood samples

Colon: part of the large bowel which has the role of absorbing water and salts from digesting food. It is the final pathway for the removal of waste products from the body

Colectomy: removal of the colon by surgery. Partial colectomy is the removal of a portion of the colon

Colonoscopy: the passing of a long, flexible, narrow tube through the anus to inspect the lining of the rectum and colon (bowel)

Colostomy: the end of the colon is brought to the skin surface on the abdomen to form an external channel for the passage of stools into a colostomy bag

Colorectal Nurse Specialist: a nurse who has received specialist training and is experienced in all aspects of bowel cancer

Constipation: incomplete or infrequent bowel motions. This can cause straining and discomfort when passing a stool

Cryotherapy: an alternative form of cancer treatment where needles are used to apply freezing gases to cancerous cells in order to destroy them

CT scan: (computerized tomography) a high quality x-ray with the ability to examine soft tissue, i.e. not solid material like bone, by giving a cross sectional image of 'slices' of the body

Diarrhoea: an excessive number of loose and watery stools which are often passed frequently and with urgency

Digital rectal examination: a gloved finger is used to feel for any abnormalities in the back passage (rectum)

Dukes' staging: a system devised by Cuthbert Dukes that describes the spread of the tumour and forms the main component in identifying the 'stage' of bowel cancer

Enema: the passing of a small tube through the anus to allow the introduction of a quantity of fluid into the rectum. This is used to relieve constipation or to empty the bowel

Faeces: bowel motions; stools; also called waste and poo

Family Cancer Genetics Clinic: a specialist clinic where people with a significant family history can be screened and given specific genetic advice

Fibre: a substance found in foods that come from plants, fruits and vegetables. Fibre helps to aid digestion

Flatus: gas in the stomach or intestine commonly referred to as 'wind' when passed through the rectum

Faecal Occult Blood (FOB) Test: a kit to test for traces of hidden (occult) blood in the stools. Used in the national screening programmes

Gastroenterologist: a physician specially trained in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the gastro intestinal tract

Gene (genetic makeup): the inherited characteristics of an individual; the blueprint of life

Genetics: the study of inherited genes

Gut: the word commonly used for the digestive tract

Haemorrhoids (Piles): enlargement of the normal spongy blood-filled cushions in the wall of the anus

Hemicolectomy: surgical removal of about half of the (generally) right side of the colon with subsequent joining of the remaining colon

Hickman line: a fine plastic tube inserted into a large vein through the chest wall generally for people receiving long-term chemotherapy

Histopathology: the examination of tissue from the body under a microscope to spot the signs and characteristics of disease

IBD: Inflammatory Bowel Disease - a general term for chronic inflammatory disorders affecting the small and/or large intestine e.g. Crohn's disease, Ulcerative Colitis

Ileocaecal valve: the valve at the junction of the small bowel and large bowel which controls the back flow of waste products

Ileostomy: an opening into the ileum, part of the small intestine, from the outside of the body. An ileostomy provides a new exit for waste material
Intravenous Infusion: the introduction of a solution (such as various chemotherapy treatments) into the body via a vein

Laparoscopic Surgery: commonly called 'keyhole surgery'. Several small incisions are made in the abdomen allowing a laparoscope (a small viewing camera) and specialised surgical instruments to view and operate on the tumour

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Laparotomy: a surgical incision into the abdominal cavity to examine abdominal organs

Large bowel: the colon, rectum and anus

Laser Therapy: a surgical procedure whereby a narrow beam of light called a laser is used to remove cancerous cells

Lesion: an area in a tissue or organ that has suffered damage

Liver Biopsy: a medical procedure to obtain a small piece of liver tissue for diagnostic testing

Lymph nodes: a network of vessels which transport fluid from body tissue to the blood stream, acting as the body's drainage system

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): a sophisticated X-ray machine that takes detailed pictures of internal organs, including the pelvis

Malignant: a cancerous tumour which can invade and destroy surrounding tissue and spread to other sites in the body

Margin: used in medical terms to describe a healthy section of tissue surrounding a tumour

Melaena: black tarry faeces (stool) due to the presence of partly digested blood from higher up the digestive tract

Metastases: secondary deposits of cancer cells that have travelled from the primary tumour site to other organs of the body

Metastasis/metastatic: a spread of cancer from the original site of the disease via the blood vessels or lymph channels

Monoclonal Antibodies: a form of biological therapy used with chemotherapy to treat metastatic bowel cancer

Mucosa: the name given to the lining of the bowel which produces mucus

Mucosal Lining: a membrane or lining of the bowel which contains mucus-secreting glands

Mucus: clear 'jelly like' substance which lubricates the lining of the bowel to ease the passage of stools. Excessive amounts are produced when bowel cancer is present

Multi-disciplinary team (MDT): a team made up of various health professionals who work together to discuss a patient's case and how best to manage treatment and care

Neoadjuvant chemotherapy: chemotherapy given before treatment to remove the primary tumour with the aim of improving the results of surgery

Occult blood: non-visible blood in the stools, which can be detected by a simple laboratory test known as a faecal occult blood (FOB) test

Oncologist: a physician who specialises in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer

Palliative: medication, treatment or care given for late stage cancer which can help alleviate symptoms but will not 'cure' the cancer

PET Scan: Positron Emission Tomography. It can show how body tissues are working as well as what they look like

Polyp: a cluster of cells which project as a growth, usually on a stalk, from the mucosal lining of the bowel

Prognosis: a prediction of what might happen in the future i.e. the progress of the disease

Proctoscope: a thin tube containing a light and camera which, when inserted into the rectum, allows visual inspection

Radiologist: a healthcare professional who specialises in X-ray, ultrasound and other similar examinations

Radiotherapy: the treatment of cancer by deep X-rays. Often given for rectal cancer before or after surgery

Rectum: the lowest part of the large bowel nearest the anus

Secondaries: cancer that has spread from the original site to other organs. Also known as metastases

Scan: data or image obtained from the examination of an organ or area of the body. An X-ray is a common example, producing photographs of the internal organs of the body

Screening: aims to detect bowel cancer at an early stage in people with no symptoms, when treatment is more likely to be effective

Selective Internal Radioaction Therapy (SIRT or SIR-Spheres): a non-surgical therapy that uses radioactive microspheres called Selective Internal Radiation Spheres (SIR-Spheres) to deliver radiation to cancer tumours

Sigmoidoscopy: a short, lighted tube passed through the anus into the rectum to inspect the lining of the lower part of the colon & rectum

Sterile Alcohol Therapy: a surgical procedure where sterile alcohol is injected directly into a tumour. This procedure is only suitable for tumours smaller than four to five centimetres in length

Stoma: the opening made through the abdomen for the passage of stools into a colostomy bag

Stoma Nurse: a specialist nurse trained in the care of patients who have had a stoma, their carers and families

Stools: motions, faeces, waste, poo

TNM: a system of staging of the disease. T=size of tumour; N=number of lymph nodes affected; M=spread of cancer to other organs i.e. metastatic spread

Total Mesorectal Excision (TME): a surgical procedure which removes the tumour and surrounding tissue in order to help prevent the recurrence of bowel cancer

Ultrasound or Ultrasonic Waves: inaudible sound waves which are used to examine the structure of the inside of the body

Virtual Colonoscopy (CT Colonoscopy): a non-invasive scan looking at the external and internal surface of the large bowel

X-Ray: a scan which produces data or images of internal bones and organs

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