WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CANCER
FOR USE WITH PATIENTS AND CAREGIVERS
What You Need to Know About Cancer

For use with patients and caregivers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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https://www.k4health.org/toolkits/cancersupportmaterials
What is Cancer?

- Normal cells grow in an orderly way. Cancer happens when the cells start to multiply out of control.

- The cancer cells keep on growing and making new cells. This makes it hard for the body to work the way it should.

- **EXPLAINING WHAT CELLS ARE:** Cells are the smallest parts in the human body that carry out all the functions necessary for life. Cells are usually too small to be seen with the naked eye.
What is Cancer?

NORMAL CELL → CANCER CELL → DOUBLING → MALIGNANT TUMOUR
Cancer is not just one disease, there are many types of cancer.

Cancer can start in any part of the body.

Cancer can spread to other parts of the body, either through the lymph system or the bloodstream, and when it does it’s called metastasis.

Cancers are different in the ways they grow and spread, and the ways they are diagnosed and treated.
Cancer Basics

ORIGINAL TUMOUR

SPREAD TO DIFFERENT ORGANS
### Most Common Cancers in Kenya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MEN:</th>
<th>WOMEN:</th>
<th>CHILDREN:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Prostate</td>
<td>- Cervix</td>
<td>- Lymphoma</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Oesophagus</td>
<td>- Breast</td>
<td>- Leukaemia</td>
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<td>- Kaposi sarcoma</td>
<td>- Oesophagus</td>
<td>- Nephroblastomas</td>
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<td>- Stomach</td>
<td>- Stomach</td>
<td>- Retinoblastomas</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Colorectum</td>
<td>- Kaposi sarcoma</td>
<td>- Bone cancers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most Common Cancers in Kenya

- Oesophagus Cancer
- Prostate Cancer
- Stomach Cancer
- Breast Cancer
- Colorectum Cancer
- Kaposi Sarcoma
- Cervix Cancer
What are Tumours?

- Most cancers form a lump called a tumour or a growth.
- Lumps that are not cancer are called benign.
- Lumps that are cancer are called malignant.
- Doctors take out a very small piece of the lump and look at it to find out if it’s cancer. This is called a biopsy. Most biopsies are performed with a small needle. Doing a biopsy does not cause cancer to spread.
- There are some cancers, like leukemia (cancer of the blood), that do not form tumours. They grow in the blood or other cells of the body.
What are Tumours?

**Tumour**

- MALIGNANT CELLS
- NORMAL CELLS

**Diagnosis**
If you’re wondering “What did I do wrong?” or “Why me?” you are not alone. You need to know that cancer is not a punishment for your past actions. And it is not caused by any supernatural phenomenon such as witchcraft. Cancer is a disease that can affect anyone, anywhere, in any country, at anytime. Cancer is not your fault. Focus on taking good care of yourself now.
Cancer can affect anyone

Cancer is not caused by witchcraft
Risk Factors for Cancer

- Doctors don’t know for sure what causes cancer.
- We do know that there are certain things called “risk factors” that affect your chance of getting some diseases.
- Some risk factors for cancer can be changed and others can’t. Risk factors that can’t be changed include your age, gender, and family history.
- Things that can be changed are things you do, such as whether you use tobacco or drink alcohol, what you eat, and how much exercise you get. Other risk factors are linked to things in the environment that cause cancer.
Risk Factors for Cancer

AMOUNT OF EXERCISE

ALCOHOL

TOBACCO

WHAT FOODS YOU EAT

EXPOSURE TO POLLUTANTS
Signs and symptoms are signals that something is not right in the body.

Treatment works best when cancer is found early – while it’s still small and is less likely to have spread to other parts of the body.

Common symptoms of cancer include:
- Unexplained weight loss
- Pain
- Skin changes

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Unusual bleeding

Many cancers do not cause symptoms until they are advanced and can only be diagnosed early through screening.

Remember these symptoms do not necessarily mean one has cancer as they can also be found in other diseases.
Signs and Symptoms

- Unexplained Weight Loss
- Pain
- Skin Changes
- Fever
- Fatigue
- Unusual Bleeding
Common Myths that are Untrue

- Cancer is contagious.
- Cancer can be cured by herbal treatments.
- Nothing can be done to stop the further spread of cancer.
- A pregnant mother with cancer will give birth to a child with cancer.
- Cancer is a disease only for the old or the rich.
- Cancer is a death sentence.
FALSE!
Cancer Stages

- The stage tells us if and how far the cancer has spread from where it started.
- Most cancers have four stages.
- Knowing the stage of the cancer helps the doctor decide what type of treatment is best and how well it will work.
- As a rule, a lower stage (such as a stage 1 or 2) means that the cancer has not spread very much.
- A higher number (such as a stage 3 or 4) means it has spread more. Stage 4 is the highest stage.
STAGE 0  Carcinoma in situ - early form.

STAGE 1  Cancer is only located in one organ.

STAGE 2  The tumour is growing in size, but localized.

STAGE 3  The cancer has spread to lymph nodes and possibly neighbouring tissues.

STAGE 4  Cancer has spread to other parts of the body. It is the most advanced stage.
Treatment can either be to cure the cancer, control it, or treat problems it is causing.

The most common treatments for cancer are surgery, chemotherapy and radiation.

A person with cancer may have any or all of these treatments, and in many cases several rounds of treatment might be needed.

The kinds of treatment your doctor prescribes will depend on:
- the type of cancer you have;
- the stage of the cancer;
- your age, overall health, and personal needs.

Make sure you get your treatment from an established medical facility offering cancer services.
What is Cancer Surgery?

- Some cancers can be removed through surgery.
- Surgery is best for tumours that have not spread to other parts of the body.
- Surgery may be used to cure cancer, or to treat other problems caused by the cancer.
- Ask your doctor what the purpose of the surgery is.
What is Cancer Surgery?
What is Chemotherapy?

- Chemotherapy uses strong drugs to kill cancer cells.
- Usually, the drugs are dripped into the blood through a tube and a needle.
- Some chemotherapy drugs can be swallowed in tablets or syrups.
- Chemotherapy may be given to cure cancer, or to help the patient live longer or feel more comfortable.
- The purpose of chemotherapy differs for different patients. Ask your health worker why you will be given chemotherapy.
What is Chemotherapy?
What is Radiotherapy?

- Radiotherapy is the use of radiation to kill cancer cells.
- Special equipment sends high doses of radiation to kill cancer.
- Radiation can also affect normal cells near the cancer cells. But normal cells can repair themselves and cancer cells cannot.
- Radiotherapy does not feel hot and it is not painful.
- Radiotherapy may be used to cure cancer, or slow growth of cancer.
- Ask your health worker why you will be given radiotherapy.
What is Radiotherapy?
Side Effects of Treatment

- Each treatment can have different side effects.
- Some can be severe and others fairly mild, but most cancer treatment side effects can be treated.
  - nausea and vomiting;
  - appetite loss;
  - temporary hair loss;
  - mouth sores;
  - higher risk of infection;
- bleeding or bruising after minor cuts or injuries;
- anemia (from low red blood cell counts), which can cause tiredness, shortness of breath, pale skin, and other symptoms;
- skin irritation;
- fatigue.

Most side effects go away after treatment ends. Many side effects can be treated.
Temporary Hair Loss
Mouth Sores
Skin Irritation
Many factors can affect how long a person survives after getting cancer:

- the type of cancer and where it is in your body;
- the stage of the cancer;
- certain traits of the cancer cells;
- your age and how healthy you were before cancer;
- how you respond to treatment.

Many cancers can be treated.

It can be hard to predict how long a person will survive.

Note for health care workers: be prepared for conversations specific to the patient’s cancer.
Will I Survive?
Diet Recommendations during Treatment

- Eating the right kinds of foods before, during, and after treatment can help you feel better and stay stronger.
- **PROTEIN (MEAT AND ALTERNATIVES):** legumes, poultry, lean red meat, eggs, fish, dried small fish, dairy products, nuts and simsim and peanut butters.
- **FATS AND OILS:**
  - The best sources of fats are: vegetable oils like corn, simsim, sunflower, and peanut.
  - A good diet should avoid excess saturated fats from animal sources.
  - Try to limit your intake of solid fats, such as margarine, shortening and solid cooking fats. These fats can also be found in snack foods and baked goods.
- **STARCHES:** Best sources are fruits, vegetables and whole grain. Examples include: maize, rice, beans, potatoes, sorghum, cassava, wheat, sweet potatoes, millet, green bananas, pasta and cereals.
- **VITAMINS AND MINERALS:** Vitamins and minerals play a vital role in boosting the immune system. The deep coloured varieties of vegetables contain abundant minerals and vitamins.
Diet Recommendations during Treatment

- **Greens:** Base every meal on these foods.
- **Fruits:** Often, at least two times weekly.
- **Beans & Nuts:** Often, at least two times weekly.
- **Whole Grains:** Moderate portions, daily to weekly.
- **Dairy:** Occasionally.
- **Meat:** Occasionally.
- **Fats & Oils:** Occasionally.
Water

- Water and healthy fluids are vital to health. You should drink about eight large glasses of liquid each day.
- You may need extra fluids if you’re vomiting, have diarrhea, or even if you’re just not eating much.
- You may need extra fluids while undergoing chemotherapy.
- You should avoid sugary or artificially sweetened liquids, and alcohol.
Exercise Recommendations

- Physical activity helps keep you strong. It can help reduce depression, stress, fatigue, nausea, and constipation. It can also improve your appetite.
- Each person’s exercise program should be based on what’s safe and what works best for them. It should be something you like doing.
- Listen to your body, and rest when you need to. Now is not the time to push yourself to exercise.
Coping Strategies

- Tell your family and friends about your cancer as soon as you feel up to it.
- Let them know that no one can catch it from you. Explain that you are getting treatment to get better.
- Allow friends and family to help you, and tell them what kind of help you need.
- There are a number of support groups available (refer patient and caregiver to flipchart).
- Some complementary therapies may help relieve certain symptoms of cancer, relieve side effects of treatment, or improve your sense of well-being. But other things such as herbal treatments and witchcraft can be dangerous to your health. Always talk to your doctor or nurse before seeking such treatments.
Your rights as a patient are:
- Right to access health care.
- Right to receive emergency treatment in any health facility.
- Right to refuse treatment.
- Right to confidentiality.
- Right to informed consent to treatment.
- Right to information.
- Right to be treated with respect and dignity.
- Right to a second medical opinion.
- Right to complain.

Your responsibilities as a patient are:
- To take care of yourself by adopting a healthy lifestyle.
- To adopt a positive attitude towards your health and life.
- To respect the rights of others and not to endanger their life and health.
- To give health care providers relevant, accurate information to facilitate diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation and/or counselling.
- To take care of the health records in your possession.
- To keep scheduled appointments, observe time, and if not possible communicate to the health care provider.
- To follow instructions, adhere to and not abuse or misuse prescribed medication or treatment.
Patients Rights and Responsibilities