

Dictionary of Cancer Terms

by National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.gov

This National Cancer Institute dictionary has over 6,000 terms.
For a complete list of terms, please go to www.CANCER101.org.

a

abdomen (*AB-do-men*)

The middle part of the body between the chest and the hips. It contains many organs, including the stomach, intestines, liver, gallbladder, pancreas, and others.

abdominal (*ab-DOM-ih-nal*)

Having to do with the abdomen - the part of the body between the chest and the hips. It contains the stomach, intestines, liver, gallbladder, pancreas, and other organs.

ablation (*ab-LAY-shun*)

Using surgery or radiation to remove or stop the function of an organ or tissue in the body.

acetaminophen (*a-seet-a-MIN-uh-fin*)

A drug that lowers pain and fever. (Tylenol is one brand name.)

Actonel [chemical name: risedronate] (*AK-tuh-nel*) (*rih-SED-ro-nayt*)

A drug that builds bone strength. It works by increasing the activity of the cells that make new bone. It is used to treat osteoporosis. It is also being studied for:

- reducing the risk of bone pain caused by cancer that has spread to the bone
- treating hypercalcemia (when calcium levels in the blood are too high)

It belongs to the group of drugs called bisphosphonates.

acupressure (*AK-yoo-presh-ur*)

Putting pressure on, or massaging, specific places on the body. This is done to control symptoms such as pain or nausea, or to stop bleeding.

acupuncture (*AK-yoo-punk-chur*)

The technique of inserting thin needles into the skin at specific points. This can help control pain and other symptoms.

acute (*a-KYOOT*)

When symptoms start suddenly and last for a relatively short period of time. Not long-lasting or chronic.

acute leukemia (*a-KYOOT loo-KEY-mee-a*)

A cancer of the bone marrow cells that can progress quickly.

acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) (*a-KYOOT limf-o-BLAS-tik loo-KEY-mee-a*)

A rapidly progressing cancer in which a large number of abnormal white blood cells called lymphoblasts are present in the blood and in the bone marrow.

Also called: acute lymphocytic leukemia.

acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) (*a-KYOOT my-eh-LOHJ-ah-nus loo-KEY-mee-a*)

A rapidly progressing cancer in which a large number of abnormal white blood cells are present in the blood and in the bone marrow.

Also called: acute myeloid leukemia or acute nonlymphocytic leukemia.

acute myeloid leukemia (AML) (*a-KYOOT MY-eh-loyd loo-KEY-mee-a*)

A rapidly progressing cancer in which a large number of abnormal white blood cells are present in the blood and in the bone marrow.

Also called: acute myelogenous leukemia or acute nonlymphocytic leukemia.

acyclovir (*a-SY-klo-veer*)

A drug that fights viruses. It is used to prevent or treat infections you may get when your immune system is not working well. This can happen when cancer treatment weakens the immune system.

adenocarcinoma (*AD-in-o kar-sin-O-ma*)

Cancer that begins in cells that line the inside of organs. These organs make substances like hormones or milk. Most breast cancers are of this type. They begin in cells that make milk or in the cells that drain the breast milk.

adenoid cystic cancer (*AD-in-oyd SIS-tik KAN-sir*)

An uncommon type of invasive breast cancer. It starts in the glands of the breast and grows into the normal surrounding breast tissue.

adenoma (*AD-in-OH-ma*)

An overgrowth of breast gland cells without any signs of cancer.

adenopathy (*ad-in-OP-a-thee*)

Large or swollen lymph nodes.

adjunctive therapy (*ad-JUNK-tiv THER-uh-pee*)

Additional treatment used together with the main treatment to make that treatment work even better.

adjuvant therapy (*AD-joo-vant THER-uh-pee*)

More treatment given to lower the chance of a cancer coming back. It comes after the main treatment plan. It may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, hormone therapy, immune treatment, and/or newer forms of treatment.

adrenal glands (*ah-DREE-nul glanz*)

A pair of small glands on top of each kidney. These glands make the steroid hormones adrenaline and noradrenaline. These hormones help control heart rate, blood pressure, and other important body activities.

adrenaline (*ad-REN-uh-lin*)

A chemical that helps you respond to danger. It is a neurotransmitter which carries nerve signals from one nerve cell to another.

Also called: epinephrine

Adriamycin [chemical name: doxorubicin] (*AY-dree-uh-MY-sin*)

A drug that kills cancer cells by stopping their growth. It can also make it hard for cancer cells to fix damage. It is a type of chemotherapy.

adverse effect (*AD-virs EF-fekt*)

An unwanted side effect of treatment.

agonists (*A-guh-nists*)

Drugs or hormones that trigger a response from a cell or another drug.

agranulocyte (*a-GRAN-yoo-low-site*)

A type of white blood cell or immune cell. Examples are lymphocytes and monocytes.

alendronate sodium [brand name: Fosamax] (*uh-LEN-druh-nayt SO-dee-um*)

A drug that builds bones strength. It works by increasing the activity of the cells that make new bone. It is used to treat osteoporosis. It is also being studied for:

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alkaloid (*AL-ka-loyd*)

One of a large group of chemicals produced by certain types of nitrogen-containing plants. Some alkaloids can kill cancer cells. They are used as chemotherapy.

alkylating agents (*al-ka-LAYT-ing AY-jints*)

A group of chemotherapy drugs. These drugs kill cancer cells by stopping their growth. They can also make it hard for cancer cells to repair damage. Some common alkylating agents are cyclophosphamide (brand name: Cytoxan) and 5-fluorouracil (also called 5-FU or fluorouracil).