

Diagnosing Liver Cancer - A Quick Guide



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This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing liver cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Tests for liver cancer
- Further tests for liver cancer
- Questions for your doctor

Tests for liver cancer

You will usually see your family doctor first, who will examine you and ask about your general health. Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms, including when you get them and whether anything you do makes them better or worse. If your doctor feels that further tests are needed, he or she will refer you to a specialist at your local hospital.

At the hospital

The specialist will ask about your medical history and symptoms. He or she will examine you, and feel your tummy (abdomen). You may have some blood tests, called liver function tests (LFT). You may also have scans such as an ultrasound scan, CT scan or MRI scan.

Biopsy and laparoscopy

The only clear way to definitely diagnose cancer is to take a sample of tissue. This is called a biopsy. You may have a biopsy at the same time as an ultrasound or CT scan. Or, you may have a small operation called a laparoscopy. The surgeon puts a thin tube, with a camera and a light, into your abdomen through a small cut. This allows your surgeon to look directly at your liver.

Further tests for liver cancer

If your earlier tests show you have liver cancer, your specialist may ask you to have further tests to see if the cancer has spread or not. The results will help your doctor decide on the best possible treatment for you. These further tests include X-rays and hepatic angiography.

Hepatic angiography is useful for the doctors to see the arteries that supply blood to the liver. And to see how close any liver tumours are to major blood vessels. The test is done in the X-ray department. You may have it as an outpatient or you may need to stay in hospital overnight. The doctor injects a dye into one of your arteries. The dye travels through your bloodstream. X-ray pictures show the blood vessels as the dye reaches your liver.



After the tests

You will be asked to come back to the hospital when your test results have come through. This is bound to take a little time, even if only a week or so. You are likely to feel anxious during this time. While you are waiting for results it may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience.

What to ask your doctor about liver cancer tests

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Will the tests show whether my cancer can be operated on?
- Are any of the tests painful?
- Are there any risks with any of these tests?
- Can I eat normally before these tests?
- What are the side effects of these tests?
- Will I have to stay in hospital for any of these tests?
- How long will the results take?
- Who will give me the test results?

More information

For more information about liver cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in July 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2011. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).