

FRANKLY SPEAKING ABOUT CANCER

Metastatic Colorectal Cancer

Diagnosed with Metastatic Colorectal Cancer?

It can be frightening to learn you or a loved one has been diagnosed with metastatic colorectal cancer. It is important to understand the diagnosis, possible treatment options and to develop a plan for your care.

Metastatic colorectal cancer (mCRC) is a cancer that begins in the lowest part of the digestive system: the large intestine (colon or rectum) and has spread to other organs and lymph nodes. For some people this will be the first time they are diagnosed with mCRC and for others, they will have had the disease and it has come back. Metastatic colorectal cancer is also called Stage IV.

You matter. Your wants, your goals and your needs are the MOST important things you should consider.

— Dr. Mitch Golant

Questions to Ask

What kind of cancer do I have and where is it in my body?
Who will be on my treatment team?
What do I want for my life?

Support for Finding Facts about Metastatic Colorectal Cancer

Cancer Support Community

888-793-9355

www.cancersupportcommunity.org

Fight Colorectal Cancer

877-427-2111

www.fightcolorectalcaner.org

National Cancer Institute

800-422-6237

www.cancer.gov

American Cancer Society

800-227-2345

www.cancer.org



You Are Not Alone



Help is available – and important.

No one has to do this alone. People around you want to help. Think about the things that each of them can do based on their availability and skills and let them know what would help.

People diagnosed with mCRC tend to gain a great deal of support from others who have similar experiences. Contact organizations that specialize in colorectal cancer or social and emotional support. It can also be helpful to talk to your doctor, nurse, or oncology social worker about what your needs are, and how they can help.



Fight Colorectal Cancer offers patient education and patient services via their toll free answer line. Each month they host a free patient webinar with leading medical experts. Fight Colorectal Cancer can help you better understand your diagnosis and treatment options. Call them at [1-877-427-2111](tel:1-877-427-2111) or connect with them online at www.FightColorectalCancer.org



The Cancer Support Community is also here to help you. The Cancer Support Community provides the highest quality social and emotional support for people impacted by cancer through a network of over 55 licensed affiliates, more than over 100 satellite locations and a vibrant online community, touching more than one million people each year. To access our resources contact our Cancer Support Helpline at [1-888-793-9355](tel:1-888-793-9355) or visit us at www.cancersupportcommunity.org



End of Life Issues

There may come a time when cancer treatments are no longer working. Or you may decide you want to spend the time you have left in other ways, with medical care working to keep you comfortable.

Hospice care provides comfort for people with advanced cancer who are no longer receiving treatment for the cancer. Hospice care is most commonly delivered by trained nurses who visit you at home, but hospice care can also be delivered in inpatient facilities. Hospice is focused on enhancing the quality of your remaining life, by keeping you as alert and comfortable as possible in a familiar environment, at home if you prefer.



Starting Point and Making Plans



Learn facts about Metastatic Colorectal Cancer and your diagnosis



Understanding your diagnosis

Knowing the stage of the cancer and where the cancer has spread will help with making treatment decisions. Your doctor may suggest one or several of the following tests:

- Physical and rectal exams
- Blood tests
- Needle biopsy
- Gene mutation analysis on the tumor
- Abdominal ultrasound
- CT (computed tomography)
- MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)
- PET (positron emission tomography)
- Bone Scan
- Colonoscopy



Second Opinions

It is important to have a second opinion. You can seek a second opinion about your diagnosis and treatment recommendations. Doctors are not insulted if you seek a second opinion. Insurance companies often encourage second opinions.



Getting Started

Once your diagnosis is confirmed as mCRC, talk to a medical oncologist about your next steps and treatment options. Your treatment team will include people who can help you with:

- Making treatment decisions
- Managing the side effects of treatment
- Managing problems with bowel obstruction
- Sexual complications
- Digestive problems
- Stress
- Anxiety
- Helping your family cope with your diagnosis
- Managing the cost of treatment
- End-of-life concerns and plans

Questions to Ask

What diagnostic tests will I have?

How will the test results help me make a treatment decision?

Who is on my treatment team?

How do I get in touch with different members of my team?

Who do I talk to about support for me and my family?

Treatment Options



Surgery

Surgery can be a treatment option for some patients who have been diagnosed with mCRC. There are several areas of the body where surgical removal of the cancer might be possible:

- Liver
- Lungs
- Peritoneum (thin covering of the abdominal organs)

While surgery can be an important part of your care, surgery is not helpful for all patients with mCRC. The decision to proceed with surgery is usually made in a multidisciplinary setting. For patients who have mCRC in the liver and who are not candidates for surgery, other options might exist, including:

- *Radiofrequency ablation* – a small wire emits radio waves into the tumor to destroy the cancer that has spread to the liver without harming healthy tissue
- *Cryosurgery* – liquid nitrogen is used to freeze and destroy cancer cells that have spread to the liver
- *Embolization* – used to shrink a tumor found in the liver by cutting off its blood supply
- *Radioactive microbeads* – tiny radioactive beads are injected into the blood supply of the liver to directly treat cancer in the liver.

As with surgery, these options are helpful only to certain patients. Ask your doctor if these options are right for you.



Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is recommended to reduce symptoms (shrink the tumor) and prolong survival. Chemotherapy drugs kill all rapidly dividing cells in the body – such as hair and stomach lining.

Conventional chemotherapy drugs for mCRC include:

- 5-fluorouracil (5-FU) which is usually given in the vein, (intravenously (IV)) with a second drug, leucovorin
- Orally active FU-like drugs, such as capecitabine (Xeloda)
- IV oxaliplatin (Eloxatin)
- IV irinotecan (Campostar)
- Because these medications work in different ways when used together or alone, doctors are trying to personalize their approach to treating each mCRC patient, especially considering how side effects could impact lifestyle.



Targeted Therapy

This newer type of treatment works differently than traditional chemotherapy by attaching to targets (proteins) on cancer cells or in the bloodstream to prevent tumor growth, or cut off tumor blood supply. These drugs have different side effects than chemotherapy such as rash, high blood pressure, and flu-like symptoms, among others.

Targeted therapy options include:

- Ziv-aflibercept (Zaltrap)
- Regorafenib (Stivarga)
- Panitumumab (Vectibix)
- Bevacizumab (Avastin)
- Cetuximab (Erbix)

These drugs are used with traditional chemotherapy or alone.

Questions to Ask

Who will do my surgery?

How long will it take for me to recover from surgery and who will help me manage after surgery?

How will surgery impact other treatment options?

Which chemotherapy regimen will impact my lifestyle the least?

Will I need help driving to and from appointments for chemotherapy?

Will chemotherapy help me live longer?



Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy uses high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells. Radiation is used mostly to shrink tumors when the cancer is causing blockages, or to help with certain cancer symptoms. Radiation therapy is often given with chemotherapy.



Clinical Trials

Clinical trials enable patients to try new treatments for metastatic colorectal cancer. Some clinical trials test new ways to use drugs or techniques that are already approved, others test completely new and hopeful techniques. Ask your doctor about clinical trial options.



Palliative Care

Palliative care is used to relieve symptoms from mCRC or side effects from treatment. Palliative care is also called supportive care or symptom management. Palliative care is a critical part of cancer care, regardless of what type of treatment you are getting. It can help with physical symptoms, emotional stress, depression, and anxiety. Palliative care can include doctors specially trained in palliative medicine, nurses, social workers, or counselors. These specialists can help establish future plans around your medical care or help your family better understand your illness and how to support you.



Monitoring Your Treatment

Your doctor will want to monitor how well your treatment is working. This means having CT scans every few months and talking with you to understand your symptoms. Be sure to talk with your doctor or nurse frequently about new or worsening symptoms. Your doctor might change your treatment based on how your body or your cancer responds. Dosage changes, brief pauses, and chemotherapy changes are common in the treatment of mCRC.

Questions to Ask

Why do you recommend one targeted therapy versus another?

If the first targeted therapy stops working, can I take a different one?

Am I eligible for a clinical trial?

What resources are available to help me pay for my treatment?

Is there a social worker or nurse who can help me with emotional concerns?

Is there a support group I can attend?

Making a Treatment Decision

Your doctor will recommend a course of treatment based on a variety of different factors. Although cancer is a complicated disease, this is your life and you can make informed decisions about your care.

Keep asking questions to get more information and start discussions. Consider talking to a Cancer Support Community Open to Options Specialist to help you have a clearer picture of what you want from treatment.

Call 1-888-793-9355 to talk to a specialist today.



VALUABLE RESOURCES

Help is available to you and your loved ones. These resources can help you understand your treatment options, manage side effects, deal with emotions and connect with others impacted by metastatic colorectal cancer.

Support for Finding Facts about Metastatic Colorectal Cancer

Cancer Support Community	888-793-9355	www.cancersupportcommunity.org
Fight Colorectal Cancer	877-427-2111	www.fightcolorectalcancer.org
National Cancer Institute	800-422-6237	www.cancer.gov
American Cancer Society	800-227-2345	www.cancer.org
American Society of Clinical Oncology	888-651-3038	www.cancer.net
Colon Cancer Alliance	877-422-2030	www.ccalliance.org

Support for People with Ostomies

United Ostomy Associations of America	800-826-0826	www.uoaa.org
Shaz's Ostomy Pages		www.ostomates.org

Help with Financial and Legal Concerns

Patient Advocate Foundation	800-532-5274	www.patientadvocate.org
Partnership for Prescription Assistance	877-477-2669	www.pparx.org
Survivorship A-Z		www.survivorshipatoz.org

Finding Clinical Trials

Fight Colorectal Cancer	877-427-2111	www.fightcolorectalcancer.org
Food and Drug Administration	888-463-6334	www.fda.gov
NCI's Clinical Trials Registry	888-422-6237	www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials
CSC's Emerging Med Search	800-814-8927	www.cancersupportcommunity.org

Caregiver Support, Complementary Support

Caregiver Action Network	202-772-5050	www.caregiveraction.org
National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine	888-644-6226	http://nccam.nih.gov



The Cancer Support Community and its partners provide this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. We strongly suggest consulting your doctor or other health care professionals to answer questions and learn more.

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