

# WHAT IS CANCER AND WHY DID I GET IT?

## What is 'cancer'?

Cancer is a word that's loaded and scary – there's a reason it's sometimes known as the C-word. The truth is though, it will affect most of our lives in one way or another and, as one child told us, 'the word is scarier than the illness'.

On the simplest level, cancer is a disease of the cells in our body.

## It's not your fault

Getting cancer, especially when you're so young, will be a total shock but there's no need to blame yourself, or anyone else. Most of the time, we don't know why one young person gets cancer and another doesn't.

What we do know is, at your age, lifestyle choices won't be the reason you have cancer. This is more of a risk for middle-aged or older people. So while cigarettes and takeaways won't do you any favours, it's very unlikely they will have had anything to do with your cancer.

Some reasons for cancer in young people could be:

- There might be a higher risk of cancer in your family.
- You may have had a viral infection, like the flu, which could have increased your risk of developing cancer.
- Some cancers start before you are even born – when you are growing in the womb.
- Doctors think young people may develop cancers, like brain tumours, when they grow very quickly.

**"When the test results came back and I was given the diagnosis, I felt so shocked. I wondered if I had done anything to cause the condition, but the consultants at the hospital said that it had developed naturally and it wasn't my fault."**

**Anais, diagnosed with a brain tumour when she was 16**

## What happens when someone has cancer?

The millions of cells in our body do different things. Some, for example, convert food into energy, and others cluster together to form organs like the heart.

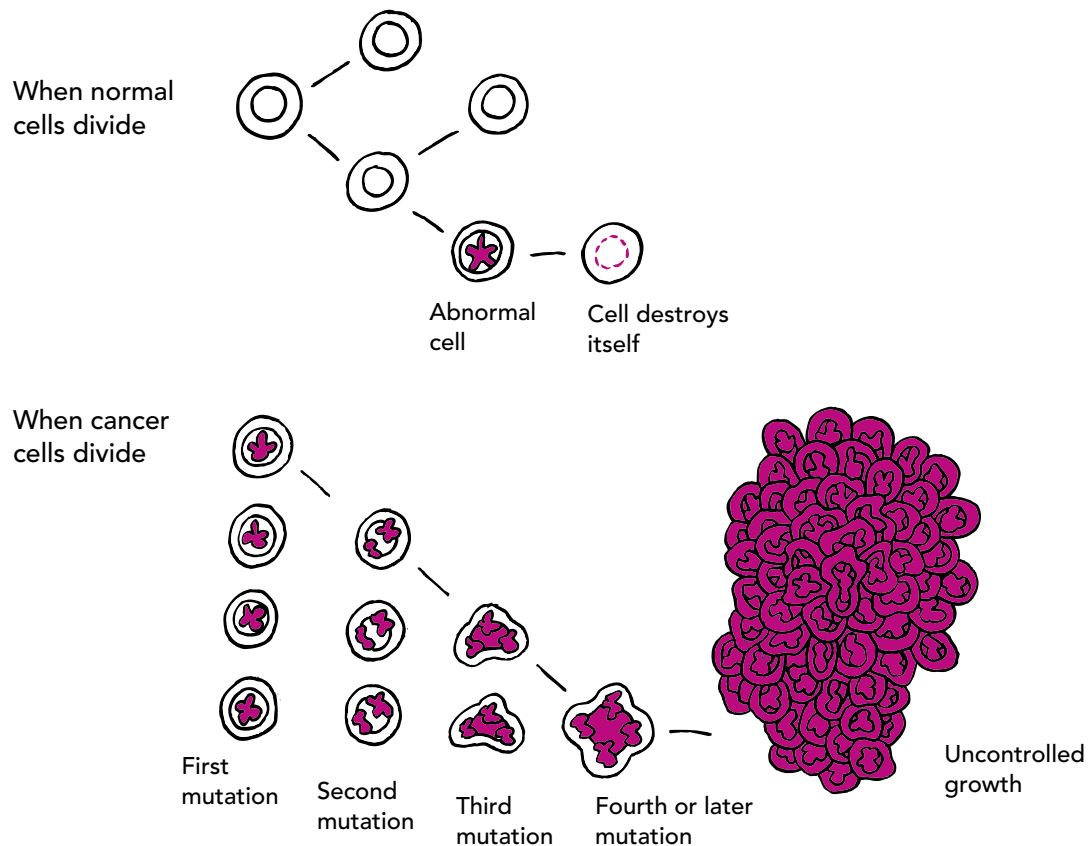
Cells divide and make copies of themselves, replacing older cells and helping you to grow. But if something goes wrong when this happens, an 'abnormal' cell can be created.

Then the cell usually destroys itself.

Sometimes though, abnormal cells carry on dividing. If these abnormal cells are able to spread to other parts of the body, they are called 'malignant'. This is what cancer is.

**Benign** is when a group of abnormal cells form a lump that is not cancer, but you might still need treatment to stop it growing.

**Malignant** also means 'cancer' and is when abnormal cells can spread to other parts of the body if they aren't treated.



Because there are so many types of cells, there are over 200 different types of cancer. So cancer isn't just one disease – it's more of an umbrella term. Your treatment will be tailored to the type of cancer you have, so you can be sure you're getting the best possible care for you.

### Who are we?

CLIC Sargent is a charity dedicated to supporting young people like you. We help people with cancer aged 24 and under from diagnosis onwards. To find out more about how we can help you and your family, or for more information about living with cancer, visit [clicsargent.org.uk](https://clicsargent.org.uk)