

Bone Cancer

What is bone cancer?

Many types of cancer can spread to the bones. But, there are three cancers that start in bones: osteosarcoma (OS-tee-oh-sar-CO-ma), Ewing sarcoma, and chondrosarcoma (KON-dro-sar-CO-ma). Osteosarcoma and Ewing sarcoma are more common in children and teenagers. Chondrosarcoma is more common in middle-aged adults. These cancers are rare, but it is important to catch them early and get treatment.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of bone cancer can be vague at first. The most common symptoms are pain and swelling, usually over the long bones of the legs and arms, and near the hips and pelvis. The pain might start after a minor sports injury or a fall. Fevers, pain at night, or pain that causes limping can also be symptoms of bone cancer. It is important to see your doctor if you have any of these symptoms.

How will my doctor know if it's cancer?

Your doctor will examine you and order x-rays. You also might need a bone scan, computed tomography (CT) scan, or

magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to check other parts of your body, especially your lungs. If these tests show that you might have cancer, your doctor will do a biopsy.

How is it treated?

People with bone cancer are treated at centers that specialize in bone cancer treatment. Treatment depends on your overall health and the type of bone cancer you have. You and your doctor will discuss the pros and cons of each type of treatment. The most common treatments are:

- **Chemotherapy.** These are medicines that destroy cancer cells and shrink tumors. Chemotherapy is used to treat bone cancer and cancer cells that spread to the lungs or other parts of the body. Chemotherapy is often given before and after surgery to remove a bone cancer tumor.
- **Surgery.** This is the preferred treatment for bone cancer. It usually happens after chemotherapy.
- **Radiation therapy.** This can be an alternative to surgery in people with Ewing sarcoma. Radiation therapy cannot treat osteosarcoma.

continues



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <https://familydoctor.org>.

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2018 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.

Bone Cancer *(continued)*

What happens after treatment?

You will see your doctor often. If you have surgery, you may need physical therapy afterward. You and your doctor will discuss how often you should have x-rays and CT scans to make sure the cancer hasn't come back.

What happens if the cancer comes back?

You and your doctor will discuss treatment options. You will probably have the same type of treatments as before.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAPF's Patient Information Resource

<https://familydoctor.org/condition/bone-cancer>

<https://familydoctor.org/condition/osteosarcoma>

American Cancer Society

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/bone-cancer.html>

National Cancer Institute

<https://www.cancer.gov/types/bone>

National Library of Medicine

<https://medlineplus.gov/bonecancer.html>

August 2018