To find cancers terms that are not listed below, visit CancerNet, a service of the National Cancer Institute, at www.cancernet.gov/dictionary.html.

**Ablation:** Removal or destruction of a body part or tissue or its function. Ablation may be performed by surgery, hormones, drugs, radiofrequency, heat, or other methods.

**Acute:** Coming on quickly but not lasting long.

**Adenocarcinoma:** Cancer that starts in glands or in organs that have glandular cells. Examples include cancer of the breast, colon, and pancreas.

**Adenoma:** A non-cancerous tumor.

**Adjuvant chemotherapy:** Treatment aimed at cancer cells that cannot be detected, but are thought to exist because of the stage or type of cancer. It is given after surgery.

**AFP:** Alpha feta protein, which is a tumor marker.

**Alopecia:** The loss of hair.

**Alternative therapy:** Therapy that is generally not viewed by the medical community as standard. Includes practices such as taking of mega doses of vitamins or magnet therapy. See also *complementary therapy*.

**Analgesic:** A drug used to ease pain.

**Anemia:** A condition in which the body doesn’t make enough red blood cells. Symptoms can include tiredness, shortness of breath and weakness.

**Angiogenesis:** The process by which a tumor forms new blood vessels, which it uses to get the nutrients it needs to keep growing.

**Anorexia:** Loss of appetite.
**Antibody:** A special protein made by immune system cells to help the body fight infection.

**Antiemetic:** A drug used to prevent or ease nausea and vomiting.

**Antifungal:** A drug used to treat infections caused by different kinds of fungi.

**Antigen:** Any substance that causes the body to produce natural antibodies.

**Anti-neoplastic Agent:** A drug that prevents, kills, or blocks the growth and spread of cancer cells. (Chemotherapy)

**Arrhythmia:** An abnormal heartbeat.

**Axillary nodes:** Lymph nodes (also called glands) found in the armpit.

**Barium enema:** An X-ray examination of the lower bowel during which a thick, milky solution is given as an enema to help the lower part of the bowel show up better on the X-ray film.

**Barium swallow:** An X-ray examination of the esophagus during which a thick, milky solution is given as a drink to help the esophagus show up better on the X-ray film.

**Basal cell carcinoma:** Cancer that starts in the basal cells. These cells make up a layer of the skin.

**B-HCG:** Beta Human Chorionic Gonadatrophin.

**Benign:** Non-cancerous. Used to describe a swelling or growth that is not cancerous and does not spread to any other part of the body.

**Biopsy:** Surgery in which a piece of tissue is removed from the body. The tissue is looked at under a microscope to see if cancer cells are present or to make other diagnoses.

**Biotherapy:** A type of cancer treatment that stimulates the immune system or uses antibodies. It is only used in very specific types of cancer, such as melanoma.

**Blood cells:** Tiny structures made in the bone marrow. They include of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets.
**Blood counts:** The number of white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets in a blood sample.

**Bone marrow:** A semi-hard, spongy material inside bones that makes all types of blood cells.

**Bone marrow biopsy:** A procedure in which a needle is inserted into the hipbone to remove a small piece of bone marrow that is then looked at under a microscope.

**Bone marrow suppression:** When bone marrow is not making blood cells due to disease or some type of treatment or toxin (for example, chemotherapy).

**Bone marrow transplant (BMT):** A procedure in which a person is given extra bone marrow cells to replace those lost during treatment with high doses of chemotherapy and/or radiation.

**Bone scan:** A scan that looks specifically at the bones to see if cancer is present, if there is damage, or if bones are healing.

**Brachytherapy:** A procedure in which tiny, radioactive seeds are placed directly into or near a tumor. (for example – prostate cancer)

**Bronchogenic carcinoma:** Cancer that starts in the **bronchi**, the large airways of the lungs.

**Bronchoscopy:** A procedure that examines the airways that lead to the lungs. A thin, flexible, lighted tube is inserted through the nose or mouth to allow the area to be seen directly.

**BSE:** Breast self exam.

**Cancer:** The group of disease in which malignant cells grow out of control and spread to other parts of the body.

**Cancer in situ:** Very early cancer that has not spread to nearby tissue.

**Carcinoma:** Several kinds of cancerous growths that come from epithelial cells. These are the cells that line organs and make up the skin. See also **melanoma**.

**Carcinogen:** A substance that causes cancer. For example, nicotine in cigarettes is a carcinogen that causes lung cancer.
Candidiases: A common fungal or yeast infection.

CA125: A tumor marker.

CAT scan (also called a CT scan): A test that uses computers and X-rays to create cross-sectional pictures of the body’s organs.

Cardiomegaly: Enlargement of the heart.

Cardiomyopathy: A disease of the heart muscle that causes the heart to pump poorly.

Case manager: A professional who helps a patient manage finances and insurance issues that may arise during treatment for cancer.

CEA: Carcinoembryonic antigen – a tumor marker.

Cellulitis: The inflammation of an area of the skin.

Central venous catheter (CVC): A tube that is placed into a large vein in the chest. It allows medications and fluids to be given, and blood to be drawn for tests without having to “stick” a person’s vein (for example - Groshong catheter).

Cervical carcinoma: Cancer that starts in the cells that line the cervix.

Cervical nodes: Glands in the neck and under the jaw that help defend against infection.

Chemotherapy: Treatment that uses drugs to destroy fast-growing cancer cells.

Chronic: Lasting a long time.

Clinical trial: A controlled experiment to test how well a new drug or group of drugs work in treating a specific disease.

Colonoscopy: A test done by inserting a thin, flexible, lighted tube through the rectum into the colon to let a doctor look inside the entire length of the colon for abnormal growths or polyps.

Colostomy: Surgery in which an opening is created between the large intestine and the surface of the abdomen to allow stool from the large intestine to empty into a collection bag.
Colposcopy: A procedure that allows a doctor to look at the vagina and cervix.

Combination chemotherapy: The use of more than one drug during cancer treatment.

Complementary therapy: Treatments that go along with the standard medical treatment of cancer. Examples include massage, visualization, and yoga. See also alternative therapy.

Congestive heart failure (CHF): A condition in which the heart does not pump well enough to meet the needs of other organs.

CT scan: See CAT scan.

Cyberknife®: Type of high dose radiation that uses robotics and continuous image guidance to precisely target tumors and lesions while minimizing damage to surrounding healthy tissue.

Cyst: A sac with liquid or gel-like material inside.

Cystitis: An infection of the bladder.

Dietitian: A professional who helps patients figure out what to eat in order to maintain weight and energy while undergoing cancer treatment

Drug resistance: When cancer cells adapt so that the drug being used stops working.

Dysphagia: Difficulty swallowing.

Dyspnea: Difficult or pain breathing, shortness of breath.

Dysurea: Difficult or painful urination.

Edema: Swelling of a part of the body due to fluid retention.

Electrocardiogram (EKG or ECG): A test that looks at how the heart is working by measuring the electrical impulses it produces.

Electrolytes: Chemicals in the body, such as potassium and sodium, which help keep fluids in balance and organs working properly.

Endometrial carcinoma: Cancer that starts in the lining of the uterus.
**Endoscopy**: A procedure in which a thin, flexible, lighted tube is inserted through the mouth into the esophagus (food pipe) so that a doctor can see inside the esophagus and stomach.

**Erythema**: Redness of the skin.

**Esophagitis**: Inflammation or irritation of the esophagus.

**Estrogen**: A female hormone produced mainly by the ovaries.

**Estrogen Receptor (ER) Assay**: A test that determines if breast cancer is stimulated by the hormone estrogen.

**Excision**: The removal of something (tissue, organ) by cutting.

**Fine-needle aspiration (FNA)**: A test in which a small needle is inserted and a sample of tissue or fluid is removed. The sample is looked at under a microscope to see if cancer cells are present. Also called *needle biopsy*.

**Fistula**: A hole that forms between two areas of the body. For example, a hole that forms between the rectum and an area on the skin near the anus is called an anal fistula.

**Frozen section**: A procedure in which a sample of tissue is frozen after being removed from the body, placed under a microscope, and examined for cancer cells.

**Gastric**: Relating to the stomach.

**Genes**: The material that passes on traits and characteristics from parents to their children.

**Hematocrit (HcT)**: The percentage of red blood cells in the blood. Low hematocrit can be a sign of anemia.

**Hematologist**: A doctor who treats problems and diseases of the blood and bone marrow.

**Hematuria**: Blood in the urine.

**Hemoglobin (Hgb)**: The part of red blood cells that carries oxygen to the cells of the body.

**Hepatic**: Relating to the liver.
**Hodgkin's disease:** Lymphoma, or cancer, in which the lymph nodes, spleen, or other lymphatic tissue become enlarged. Symptoms can include fever, weight loss, fatigue, and night sweats.

**Hormone:** A substance made in several organs of the body and which the body uses to control growth, reproduction, and the way the body works.

**Hospice care:** Care and support given by specially-trained people to patients who are in the late stages of their life. It may be offered at home or in the hospital.

**Hypersensitivity:** Allergic reaction to a medication. It causes nervousness, shortness of breath, racing heartbeat and can be life threatening.

**Ileostomy:** Surgery in which an opening is created between the small intestine and the surface of the abdomen to allow waste from the small intestine to empty into a collection bag.

**Immunity (immune system):** The body's defense against disease and infection.

**Immunosuppression:** When the immune system has been weakened or damaged and cannot fight infection or disease.

**Immunotherapy:** See biotherapy.

**Implanted port:** A quarter-sized disk is placed under the skin to allow a doctor or nurse to give medication or fluids and to draw blood without having to “stick” a person’s vein. (for example Power Port)

**Infusion:** Putting medicine or fluid into the bloodstream over a period of time.

**Injection:** Putting medicine into the body through a needle and syringe.

**Intramuscular:** Into the muscle.

**Intravenous:** Into the vein.

**Laryngectomy:** Surgical removal of the voice box (larynx).

**Lesion:** A damaged area in or on the body caused by an injury or a disease (such as cancer).
Leukemia: Cancer of the blood in which the body makes large numbers of abnormal blood cells.

Leukemia (acute): A rapidly-progressing cancer in which abnormal white blood cells stay very immature and cannot carry out their normal functions.

Leukemia (chronic): A slowly-progressing cancer in which abnormal white blood cells are more mature and can carry out some of their normal functions.

Leukopenia: A low number of white blood cells.

Lumpectomy: Surgery to remove a breast lump and some of the tissue around it. Also called a segmental mastectomy.

Lymphatic system: A network of lymph nodes and vessels by which infection-fighting cells move through the body. Cancer cells can also use this network to travel and spread around the body.

Lymphedema: Swelling in the area drained by lymph nodes when lymph nodes have been removed or are blocked.

Lymph nodes: Hundreds of small, bean-shaped organs (sometimes called glands) located within specific areas of the body called the lymphatic system. They act as filters to collect and destroy bacteria. Cancer cells that may be moving through the lymphatic system can become trapped in the lymph nodes.

Lymphocytes: White blood cell that kills viruses and defends against the invasion of foreign material.

Lymphoma: Cancer of the lymphatic system.

Malignant: Cancerous. A growth that tends to invade and destroy nearby tissues and spread to other parts of the body.

Malignant tumor: A tumor made up of cancer cells (as opposed to a benign tumor, which is made up of normal cells).

Mammogram: An X-ray of the breast taken to detect abnormal growths.

Mastectomy: Surgery to remove a breast.
**Melanoma:** Cancer of the pigment cells in the skin. It usually starts with a mole that changes in size, shape, or color.

**Metastasize:** Spread (as in cancer) from the place where it started to the lymph nodes and/or other organs in the body such as the bone or liver.

**MRI (magnetic resonance imaging):** A scan that uses magnetic waves to create images of the body.

**Mucosa:** Membranes that line a body part or organ, such as the mouth or bowel.

**Mucositis:** A condition in which mucous membranes swell and become inflamed.

**Needle biopsy:** See *fine-needle aspiration.*

**Neoadjuvant chemotherapy:** Chemotherapy given before a planned surgery to shrink the tumor and make it easier to remove.

**Neoplasm:** An abnormal growth of cells that forms a tumor.

**Neutropenia:** A decrease in the number of infection-fighting white cells (called neutrophils).

**Neutropenic fever:** Body temperature over 101 degrees that occurs because the body does not have enough white blood cells to fight its own bacteria or an infection.

**Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma NHL:** A group of cancers of the lymphatic system; for example, large cell lymphoma and B-cell lymphoma.

**Oncogene:** A gene that normally directs cell growth. If altered, it promotes the uncontrolled growth of cancer.

**Oncologist:** A doctor with special training in the treatment of cancer.

**Oncology:** The study of cancer and its treatment.

**Oncology-certified nurse (OCN):** A registered nurse who has passed a national test that proves he or she understands the specialty of oncology (cancer treatment).
Oncology Nurse Navigator: A registered nurse with expertise in cancer who provides information, education, and support to patients and families throughout their care.

Oncology pharmacist: A pharmacist who specializes in cancer drugs.

Palliative treatment: Treatment aimed at easing pain or other physical problems caused by cancer. Its goal is to make a patient as comfortable as possible. It is not meant to cure the disease.

Pap (Papanicolaou) smear: A test that looks at a smear of the cervix for abnormal cells or cancer.

Paracentesis: Placing a needle into the abdominal cavity to remove fluid that has built up there.

Pathological fracture: A break in a bone that happens without trauma. Occurs at a place in the body where cancer or another disease is present.

Pathology: The process of looking at tissue samples and body fluids under a microscope to detect cancer cells, or to see how cancer cells have changed. A doctor who does this is called a pathologist.

PET scan (positron emission tomography): A computerized scan used to look for cancer in the body by detecting highly-active cells that are growing rapidly.

Phlebitis: Pain and swelling in a vein.

Photosensitivity: Being sensitive to light (including sunlight, filtered light, and artificial light).

Placebo: A substance that contains no active ingredients and is sometimes used in a clinical trial as a comparison to a substance doctors are studying. Also called a sugar pill.

Plasma: The fluid that blood cells float in.

Platelet (Plt) count: The number of platelets (also called thrombocytes) in a sample of blood. Platelets are the cells that help blood clot.

Pleural effusion: Collection of fluid in the lining of the lung
**Polyp:** A bulge in the mucous membrane that has grown out of shape. Polyps can be found in the bowel, bladder, throat, and nose.

**Primary tumor:** The original cancer site.

**Prognosis:** A prediction of how a disease will progress over time.

**Prophylactic:** A medicine used to prevent or guard against a side effect of cancer treatment or of disease.

**Prostatectomy:** Surgery to remove a part of or the entire prostate.

**Prosthesis:** A man-made replacement for a missing body part, such as a breast, arm, or leg.

**Protocol:** Treatment plan.

**Radiation oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in radiation therapy.

**Radiation therapy:** A form of cancer treatment that uses strong X-rays to damage or kill cancer cells.

**Radiologist:** A doctor who specializes in reading X-rays and scans.

**Recurrence:** When cancer comes back.

**Red blood cells (RBCs, erythrocytes):** Blood cells that carry oxygen to the tissues throughout the body and take carbon dioxide from them.

**Regression:** Shrinkage of a cancerous growth.

**Relapse:** Return of a cancer that has been treated and become undetectable on follow-up scans and tests.

**Remission:** When there has been no sign of cancer on follow-up tests and scans over a specific period of time.

**Renal:** Relating to the kidney.

**Robotic Assisted Surgery:** Surgery in which the surgeon uses a computer in the operating room to control small instruments attached to robotic arms. The instruments and a tiny camera are inserted through small incisions. Benefits may include decreased bleeding and pain and faster recovery.
**Sarcoma:** Cancer of the bone, cartilage, or muscle.

**Side effects:** Signs or symptoms that occur as a result of having cancer treatment, such as hair loss, nausea, or vomiting.

**Social worker:** A professional who helps patients by providing emotional support, finding needed agencies or equipment, and coordinating patients’ discharge from the hospital.

**Sputum:** Liquid and phlegm made by the lungs.

**Squamous cell carcinoma:** Cancer that starts in the squamous layer of the skin or in organs that are covered with squamous cells. The lungs, head, neck, prostate, and uterus have squamous cells.

**Staging:** A system doctors use to determine how far in the body cancer has spread.

**Stoma:** An opening made from a body cavity to the outside of the body.

**Stomatitis:** Soreness and swelling of the mouth caused by treatment. It goes away once treatment ends.

**Stool test:** A test to check for hidden blood in the stool.

**Subcutaneous:** The fatty tissue under the skin.

**Systemic disease:** Disease that affects the whole body, not just one organ.

**Thrombocytopenia:** A platelet count that is below normal.

**TNM:** A system used to describe a cancer. *T* stands for tumor, *N* stands for node, and *M* stands for metastasis. This determines the stage of the cancer and guides doctors in choosing the best treatment.

**Tracheostomy:** Inserting a tube through the neck into the trachea (breathing pipe) to allow breathing.

**Tumor:** A group of cells that grows uncontrolled. It can be benign or malignant.

**Tumor markers:** Substances made by some cancer cells. They can build up in the blood or urine of people with cancer.
**Ultrasound examination:** A test that uses sound waves to create images of organs and other body parts.

**Ureterostomy:** Surgery in which the tubes that take urine from the kidneys to the bladder (ureters) are brought out through an opening on the abdomen to let urine flow into a collection bag.

**Virus:** An infectious agent that can cause disease, such as the common cold virus.

**White blood count:** The total number of white blood cells (WBCs, leukocytes) in a blood sample. White blood cells fight infection.

**Wide excision:** The process of cutting away a wide area around a tumor or diseased tissue and leaving healthy, disease-free tissue.

**X-ray:** A way to look at bones and some internal organs using low levels of radiation.