Cancer of the Small Intestine

Cancer of the small intestine is a rare disease in which cancer cells form in the lining of the small intestine. The small intestine is a long tube that connects the stomach to the large intestine. It folds many times to fit inside the abdomen.

Possible signs of small intestine cancer include:

- Abdominal pain
- Weight loss with no known reason
- A lump in the abdomen
- Blood in the stool

Your doctor will order tests to detect, diagnose, and stage small intestine cancer. These may include:

- Physical exam and history
- Lab work — blood, urine, and stool
- X-rays, scans, endoscopy, and barium studies
- Abdominal surgery

Staging

A staging system is a standardized way in which the cancer care team describes the extent that a cancer has spread. The main system used to describe the stages of cancers of the pancreas is the American Joint Committee on Cancer (AJCC) TNM system.

Staging information can seem very confusing, but your doctor and nurse navigator will help you understand your staging.
**T categories for small intestine adenocarcinoma**

T categories of small intestine cancer describe the extent of spread through the layers that form its wall.

These layers, from the inner to the outer, include the lining (*mucosa*), the fibrous tissue beneath this muscle layer (*submucosa*), a thick layer of muscle that contracts to force the contents of the intestines along (*muscularis propria*), and the thin outermost layers of connective tissue (*subserosa and serosa*) that cover the small intestine. The serosa is also known as the visceral peritoneum.

**Tx:** No description of the tumor’s spread is possible because of incomplete information.

**Tis:** The cancer is only in the *epithelium* (the top layer of cells of the mucosa) — it has not grown into the deeper tissue layers. This is the earliest stage and is also known as *carcinoma in situ* (CIS).

**T1:** split into 2 groups.

- **T1a:** The cancer has grown from the top layer of cells of the mucosa and into the layer of connective tissue below (the lamina propria).

- **T1b:** The cancer has grown through the mucosa and into the submucosa.

**T2:** The cancer has grown through the mucosa and submucosa into the muscularis propria.

**T3:** The cancer has grown through the inner layers of the intestine wall (mucosa, submucosa, and muscularis propria) into the subserosa. It has not started to grow into any nearby organs or tissues.

**T4:** The cancer has grown through the entire wall of the small intestine (including the serosa). It may be growing into nearby tissues or organs.
N categories for small intestine adenocarcinoma

N categories indicate whether or not the cancer has spread to nearby lymph nodes.

Nx: No information about lymph node involvement is available (often because no lymph nodes have been removed).

N0: Lymph nodes near the tumor were checked and do not contain cancer.

N1: Cancer cells have been found in 1 to 3 nearby lymph nodes.

N2: Cancer cells have been found in 4 or more nearby lymph nodes.

M categories for small intestine adenocarcinoma

M categories indicate whether or not the cancer has spread to distant organs, such as the liver, lungs, or distant lymph nodes.

M0: No cancer has been found in other organs or tissues.

M1: Cancer has been found in other organs or tissues.

Stage grouping

The T, N, and M categories are combined (in a process called stage grouping) to determine the stage. The stage is expressed in roman numerals from stage I (the least advanced stage) to stage IV (the most advanced stage). The following guide illustrates how TNM categories are grouped together into stages:

Stage 0: Tis, N0, M0

The cancer is in the earliest stage. It has not grown beyond the top layer of cells of the mucosa of the small intestine. This stage is also known as carcinoma in situ.
Stage I: T1 or T2, N0, M0
The cancer has grown from the top layer of cells of the mucosa and into deeper layers such as the lamina propria (T1a), the submucosa (T1b), or the muscularis propria (T2). It has not spread into nearby lymph nodes (N0) or distant sites (M0).

Stage IIA: T3 or T4, N0, M0
The cancer has grown through most of the wall of the small intestine and into the subserosa (T3). It has not yet spread to nearby lymph nodes (N0) or to distant sites (M0).

Stage IIB: T4, N0, M0
The cancer has grown through the wall of the intestine and into the serosa or into nearby tissues or organs (T4). It has not yet spread to nearby lymph nodes (N0) or to distant sites (M0).

Stage IIIA: Any T, N1, M0
The cancer has spread to 1 to 3 nearby lymph nodes (N1) but not to distant sites (M0).

Stage IIIB: Any T, N2, M0
The cancer has spread to 4 or more nearby lymph nodes (N2) but not to distant sites (M0).

Stage IV: Any T, Any N, M1
The cancer has spread to distant sites such as the liver, lung, peritoneum (the membrane lining the abdominal cavity), or ovary.

Your doctor will explain your results and discuss treatment options with you. Talk with your doctor about your questions and concerns.