

The bladder is the hollow, muscular organ that lies in the pelvic region. It looks like an upside down pyramid. The bladder stores the urine that is produced in the kidneys.

What to look for

Bladder cancer may not have symptoms in the beginning, however, later on, symptoms may include:

- blood in the urine.
- frequent urinary tract infections, painful urination, and a need to urinate often.
- weight or appetite loss.
- abdominal or back pain, fever, anaemia.

The bladder is lined with specialised cells, and when it is irritated, extra layers of these cells develop. This process may increase the chance of a cell turning cancerous.

Malignant tumours begin as small lumps on the inside of the bladder, the cancer then spreads by going deeper into bladder fibre and the surrounding tissue. If left untreated the cancer will eventually invade the bloodstream and lymphatic system.

Like all cancers, the earlier it is detected the more effective the treatment will be. Sometimes bladder tumours recur, however, prompt detection and treatment means they can be stopped while they are still superficial.

Causes

Cancer is more likely to occur if the bladder has been chronically irritated. People with inborn disorders of the bladder, chronic bladder infections, or persistent cystitis are more susceptible as well as people who have benign bladder tumours.

There is a strong link with bladder cancer and carcinogens (cancer-causing substances). Such as smokers, painters, truckers, leatherworkers, machinists and metalworkers, rubber and textile workers, and people exposed to industrial dyes. It has been reported that consumption of nitrates in smoked and cured meats such as hams, may also be associated with bladder cancer, as may consumption of caffeine and saccharin.

Traditional Treatments

Treatments for cancer in general can be investigated more in the entry on 'cancer'. There are a number of alternative therapies that may ease the pain of the disease and the side effects of conventional treatment but at this point none have been scientifically proven to cure cancer.

If detected early, superficial malignancies can usually be treated successfully. Certain bladder cancers may require the bladder to be removed. This will need to be investigated with your doctor.

After surgery, a combination of radiation and chemotherapy may be required to stop the cancer recurring. It is advisable for bladder cancer patients to have check ups regularly as these tumours may recur. If the cancer has spread surgery will not usually help. Chemotherapy would be the next option.

Prevention

To prevent any cancer it is strongly advisable to avoid any possible carcinogens.

- Don't smoke and avoid frequenting places with lots of smokers to lessen the likelihood of ingesting smoke.
- Avoid smoked or cured meats
- Try to limit processed food intake to only occasionally.
- If you work around carcinogenic chemicals, follow safety guidelines to avoid undue exposure.
- Arrange regular screenings with your doctor to ensure early detection if you feel there is a chance you may be a candidate for this disease.

When to seek further professional advice

- you have any of the symptoms listed in the description section