

MALIGNANT MESOTHELIOMA

Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer where cancer cells are found in the linings of the chest (pleura) or abdomen (peritoneum). Most people with mesothelioma have had exposure to asbestos, either in the workplace or where they grew up.

The most common symptoms are shortness of breath, pain in the chest, or as in the abdominal variant, pain or swelling in the abdomen. Spread of this disease to other body parts is very uncommon. It must be stressed that this is a slow growing disease and long-term survivals have been seen even without treatment.

To establish a diagnosis and to determine the extent of disease the following investigations are useful:

- Endoscopy or open surgical examination of the chest or abdominal cavity with biopsies of affected linings.
- Chest X-ray and/or CT chest/ abdomen
- Blood analysis

Your doctor may require further investigations depending on your symptoms at presentation.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Treatment will depend on the nature and extent of the disease as well as on your general state of health.

Surgery is often used but seldom adequate for disease control unless it is a very early lesion or the whole lung and its linings are removed. Usually only a part of the lining is removed.

Radiation therapy is often used to alleviate symptoms associated with mesothelioma, but can seldom address the disease as a whole.

Chemotherapy has been used with limited success in this disease and the use thereof is still being widely studied.

Often fluid collects in the chest or abdomen and needs to be drained, this presents an opportunity to put chemotherapy drugs into the chest to prevent a recurrence of fluid building up. Talc is also used to try and obliterate the cavity between the lung and its lining through which further build up of fluid may be diminished.

The foregoing information is quite generalized. The specifics of your disease and treatment should be discussed with your oncologist to establish the optimal treatment plan for you as an individual.