

HEPATOBIILIARY &  
LAPAROSCOPIC SURGERY

# 5 things to know about liver cancer

The liver is responsible for a range of important processes, such as the removal of toxins and metabolism of fat, carbohydrates and proteins. When cancer occurs in this organ, these important processes can get disrupted.



**Dr Tay Khoon Hean**  
*Hepatobiliary Surgeon*

**Tay Khoon Hean Surgery**  
6 Napier Road  
#08-02 Gleneagles Medical Centre  
Singapore 258499  
Tel: 6471 1221  
www.tkhsurgery.com

## 1

### 90% of primary liver cancers arise from liver cells

There are two types of liver cancers: primary and secondary. Primary liver cancer, or hepatocellular carcinoma, arises from the liver. The majority of primary liver cancers arise from liver cells, which make up 80% of liver tissue. Secondary or metastatic liver cancer is cancer that has spread to the liver from other organs such as the colon, stomach, pancreas, breast and lung. Liver cancer is a serious illness: it is rarely detectable in the early stages when it is most treatable, and the secondary stage is hard to treat because it has already spread.

## 2

### Abdominal pain occurs only when liver cancer has advanced

There are no symptoms in the initial stages. Abdominal pain usually happens only in the advanced stages of the cancer and signifies a large tumour or widespread involvement of the liver. As the disease progresses, the liver becomes enlarged and sometimes feels tender upon physical examination. Liver cancer patients with cirrhosis, scarring and hardening of the liver due to alcohol abuse may experience unexplained weight loss or unexplained fevers. Other symptoms are the sudden appearance of abdominal fluid and swelling, and jaundice.

## 3

### Liver cancer risk is 100 times higher in those with hepatitis B or C

The three main causes of liver cancer in Singapore are hepatitis B, hepatitis C and alcoholic liver disease. Liver cancer due to alcoholic liver disease is less common but still a major contributor. Other risk factors include obesity and smoking. As vaccines are available for hepatitis A and B, get yourself vaccinated to reduce your liver cancer risk. In addition, leading a healthy lifestyle — maintaining a healthy weight, having a low-fat diet, consuming alcohol in moderation — can help to keep the disease at bay.



## 4

### Depending on the location and size of the tumour, a liver transplant is one of the best survival options

This allows the diseased liver to be removed and replaced with a healthy one. If this is not an option, liver cancer patients should be evaluated for a resection — the goal is to remove the tumour completely together with the appropriate amount of surrounding liver tissue.

## 5

### If surgery is not an option

Other treatments apart from surgery include radiofrequency ablation (using microwaves to target cancer tissues) and transarterial chemoembolisation (delivering chemotherapy medication directly into the liver). [🔗](#)