

## The Stomach, Tumors, and Cancer

The stomach is a hollow organ in the upper part of the belly. It rests inside the rib cage. The upper end of the stomach is level with the bottom of the breast bone. The lower end is level with the lowest rib. When you swallow, food goes from your mouth through the esophagus and into the stomach.

The wall of the stomach has many layers. The inner layer has glands that make enzymes and stomach acid. The enzymes and acid start breaking food down so your body can use it.

The muscle layer churns the food, enzymes, and acid together. This makes a thick liquid called chyme. The muscle layer pushes the chyme into the small intestine where digestion continues.

### About Stomach Tumors

Throughout the body, new cells form to replace old, dead cells all the time. Sometimes new cells form when the body does not need them, or old cells do not die when they should. Extra cells can build up and form a mass of tissue called a growth or tumor. Tumors can be benign or malignant.

**Benign tumors** are not cancer. Surgeons, a type of doctor, can usually remove them. Once removed, benign tumors rarely come back. Their cells do not spread to other parts of the body.

**Malignant tumors** are cancer. Cancer cells can invade nearby tissues and organs. Cancer cells can also break away from the original, or primary, tumor. These cells start new tumors in other organs. Cancer that spreads is called metastatic. It can be life-threatening.

### Cancer and the Stomach

Cancer that starts in the stomach is called gastric cancer.

Here are some signs of possible stomach cancer:

- Discomfort or pain in the stomach area
- Difficulty swallowing
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weight loss
- Feeling bloated or full after a small meal
- Vomiting blood or having blood in the stool

Many other health problems can also cause these signs. If you have any of the first five signs for longer than a few days, see a doctor as soon as possible. If there is blood in your vomit or stool, see a doctor right away.