

# Bone Cancer, Secondary

Information for people with cancer

**This information should not be used to diagnose yourself or in place of a doctor's care.**

Cancers that start in another part of the body can spread to the bones through the blood or the lymphatic system (part of the immune system which protects your body against infection).

These cancers are called secondary bone cancers. The original cancer is called the primary cancer.

A metastasis or metastases is when cancer spreads from one part of the body to another part. Secondary bone cancer is also called metastatic bone cancer, bone mets or bone metastases.

For more information on primary cancers that start in the bone: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/types-of-cancer/bone-soft-tissue/bone-sarcomas](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/types-of-cancer/bone-soft-tissue/bone-sarcomas)

## Diagnosis and Staging

---

### What are the signs and symptoms of secondary bone cancer?

Secondary bone cancer symptoms can include:

- Bone pain (most common symptom).
- Broken bones (bone cancer weakens the bones).
- Spinal cord compression: when cancer growing in the bones of the spine presses on the spinal cord. This can cause numbness or tingling in the arms or legs, problems walking, or difficulty urinating (peeing). For more information: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/library-site/Documents/SpinalCordCompression.pdf](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/library-site/Documents/SpinalCordCompression.pdf).
- Hypercalcemia (high levels of calcium in the blood). This may cause symptoms such as:
  - Nausea (feeling queasy)
  - Loss of appetite

# Bone Cancer, Secondary

Information for people with cancer

- Extreme thirst
- Confusion
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- Frequent urination
- Constipation

If you have any signs or symptoms that you are worried about, please talk to your family doctor or nurse practitioner.

## How is secondary bone cancer diagnosed?

Tests that may help diagnose secondary bone cancer include:

- **Imaging tests to see the cancer and where it has spread:**
  - X-rays
  - Bone scan
  - Computed Tomography (CT) scan
  - Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan
- **Blood tests.**
- **Urine (pee) tests.**
- **Needle biopsy:** a doctor uses a needle to take a small piece of tissue. A specialist doctor (pathologist) examines the tissue to see if it is cancer.

For more information on tests used to diagnose cancer, see our Screening and Diagnosis pathfinder: [bccancer.libguides.com/pathfinder-screening](http://bccancer.libguides.com/pathfinder-screening)

## What are the types and stages of secondary bone cancer?

See the type and stage of your original (primary) cancer: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/types-of-cancer](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/types-of-cancer)

# Bone Cancer, Secondary

Information for people with cancer

## Treatment

---

### What is the treatment for secondary bone cancer?

Cancer treatment may be different for each person. It depends on your particular cancer. Your treatment may be different from what is listed here.

- Secondary bone cancer cannot usually be cured. Treatment can help with pain, other symptoms or possibly help you live longer.
- Your overall health may impact what treatments you can have.
- If you have secondary bone cancer, it may be helpful to see a team member from our Pain and Symptom Management program: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/supportive-care/pain-symptom-management](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/supportive-care/pain-symptom-management)

### Systemic Therapy (chemotherapy)

- Includes chemotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy and biologic therapies.
- Bisphosphonates (drugs that can help with bone pain and lower your risk of breaking a bone).
- For more information about systemic therapy: [bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/treatments/systemic-therapy-\(chemotherapy\)](http://bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/treatments/systemic-therapy-(chemotherapy))

### Surgery

- Can help with symptoms but cannot cure secondary bone cancer.
- Sometimes needed to put in a metal support to keep a bone weakened from cancer from breaking or to help with pain if the bone is already broken.

# Bone Cancer, Secondary

Information for people with cancer

**Radiation therapy** (uses high energy x-rays to kill or shrink cancer)

- Can help with symptoms such as pain.
- For more information about radiation therapy go to: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/treatments/radiation-therapy](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/treatments/radiation-therapy)

## What is the follow-up after treatment?

- Follow-up testing and appointments are based on your type of cancer.
- After treatment, you may return to the care of your family doctor or specialist for regular follow-up. If you do not have a family doctor, please talk to your BC Cancer health care team.

## More Information

---

### What causes secondary bone cancer and who gets it?

Secondary bone cancer is caused by the spread of the primary cancer.

The cancer cells that have spread to the bone look the same and act the same as cells from the primary cancer.

The most common places for secondary bone cancer:

- Spine
- Pelvis
- Ribs
- Skull
- Upper arm
- Upper leg

# Bone Cancer, Secondary

Information for people with cancer

## Can I help prevent secondary bone cancer?

There is no known way to prevent secondary bone cancer. The best way to stop cancer from spreading to the bone is to treat the primary cancer in the early stage.

## Is there screening for secondary bone cancer?

There is no screening program for secondary bone cancer.

If you have pain that you cannot explain, talk to your doctor.

## Where can I find more information?

- If you have questions about secondary bone cancer, please talk to your health care team.
- Our librarians can help you find the information you need. Visit our Library page: [bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/library](http://bccancer.bc.ca/our-services/services/library)
- BC Cancer Library Advanced or Metastatic Cancer pathfinder: [bccancer.libguides.com/pathfinder\\_advanced](http://bccancer.libguides.com/pathfinder_advanced)
- Managing Your Symptoms: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/managing-symptoms-side-effects](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/managing-symptoms-side-effects)
- Emotional Support: [www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/emotional-support](http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/emotional-support)