

# Kaposi Sarcoma: Treatment Choices



There are many treatment choices for Kaposi sarcoma (KS). The treatment that's best for you depends on things such as:

- The number of KS lesions and where they are
- The size of the lesions
- The types of problems the lesions are causing
- The type of KS you have
- Whether you are infected with HIV and, if so, how well it's been controlled
- Your age
- Your overall health
- What side effects you find acceptable

## Learning about your treatment options

You may have questions and concerns about your treatment options. You may want to know how you'll feel, how you'll look, and how your body will work after treatment. You may also want to know if you'll have to change your normal activities.

Your healthcare provider is the best person to answer your questions. They can explain what your treatment choices are, how well treatment is expected to work, and what the risks and side effects might be.

Your healthcare provider may advise a specific treatment. Or they may offer more than one and ask you to decide which one you'd like to use. It can be hard to make this decision. It's important to take the time you need to make the best decision.

Deciding on the best plan may take some time. Talk with your healthcare provider about how much time you can take to explore your options. You may want to get a second opinion before deciding on your treatment plan. You also may want to involve your partner, spouse, family, or friends in this process.

## Goals of treatment for Kaposi sarcoma

In many cases, the goal of treatment is to cure the cancer. If this isn't possible, treatment may be used to shrink the cancer or keep it under control for as long as possible. Treatment can also improve your quality of life by helping to control symptoms of the disease. The goal of KS treatment is to do one or more of these things:

- Keep your immune system strong and healthy
- Remove or destroy the KS lesions that have been found
- Remove or destroy tumors in other parts of your body
- Stop or slow the growth or spread of cancer cells
- Prevent or delay the cancer's return
- Ease symptoms from the cancer, such as pain or pressure on organs

Each type of treatment has a different goal. Talk with your healthcare provider about treatment goals so you know what to expect.

## Commonly used treatments for Kaposi sarcoma

Many types of treatment can be used for KS. Different combinations of treatment may be used, depending on the factors listed above. Here's an overview of each type of treatment:

- **Highly active antiretroviral treatment (HAART).** If you're infected with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), keeping the infection under control with HAART is very important. Sometimes HAART is the only treatment needed to treat AIDS-related KS.
- **Surgery and other local treatments.** Surgery might be done to remove lesions in some types of KS, especially if there are only a few lesions and they're easy to reach. Sometimes other local treatments can also be used to destroy KS lesions. These include freezing a lesion using very cold temperatures (cryosurgery) and photodynamic therapy (PDT). Other local treatment options include applying medicine to the lesions or injecting chemotherapy right into the lesion.
- **Radiation therapy.** Radiation therapy uses beams of high-energy X-rays or radioactive particles to kill cancer cells. It can be used to treat larger KS lesions on the skin or in the mouth.
- **Chemotherapy.** Chemotherapy (chemo) uses strong medicines to either kill cancer cells or stop them from growing and spreading. If chemo is given into the bloodstream, it can reach cancer cells all over the body. It might be used this way to treat cancer in parts of the body that can't be treated with local therapy. This type of treatment is called systemic treatment. Chemo can also be put right into or onto KS lesions if the cancer has not spread. In this case, the treatment is said to be local.
- **Immunotherapy.** This type of therapy uses medicines to boost the body's immune system. It's not used as one of the first treatments for KS because it can have serious side effects.
- **Supportive care.** Your healthcare provider may offer treatments that help ease your symptoms but don't treat the cancer. These are often used along with other treatments. Or your healthcare provider may suggest supportive care if they believe that available treatments are more likely to do you more harm than good.

## Clinical trials for new treatments

Researchers are always looking for new ways to treat KS. These new methods are tested in clinical trials. Taking part in a clinical trial means you get the best treatment available today, and you might also get new treatments that are thought to be even better. Before starting treatment, talk with your healthcare provider to find out if there are any clinical trials you should think about.

## Talking with your healthcare provider

At first, thinking about treatment options may seem overwhelming. Talk with your healthcare team and loved ones. Make a list of questions. Consider the benefits and possible side effects of each option. Discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider before making a decision.

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