

# Advantages and Disadvantages of Cancer Screening

There are certain advantages and disadvantages to cancer screenings, so please read and understand the following before being screened.

## Advantages of Cancer Screening

### **Early detection**

Because cancer screenings are performed when there are no subjective symptoms, there is the possibility of discovering early-stage cancers that have not yet progressed. Cancer can often be cured if it is detected early, so cancer screenings can be expected to reduce mortality rates from cancer and save lives.

### **Precancerous lesions can be found**

Cancer screenings not only find early-stage cancers, but can also find precancerous lesions (lesions that have not yet become cancers). Specifically, precancerous lesions include colon polyps that are diagnosed during colorectal cancer screenings and atypical epithelium that is detected during cervical cancer screening. If such precancerous lesions are found, then it is possible to prevent them from becoming cancer by observing their progress and treating them as necessary.

## Disadvantages of Cancer Screening

### **Burdens and risks associated with cancer screening**

Cancer screening tests can put strains on the body. For example, there is the problem of radiation exposure in X-ray examinations. The barium used in stomach cancer screenings may cause constipation. Although extremely rare, there is a non-zero risk of bleeding or of puncturing the stomach/intestines during endoscopy for stomach cancer screenings.

### **False negatives: the possibility of a "no abnormalities" diagnosis even if cancer is present**

Even if cancer is present, it may be diagnosed as "no abnormality" and the cancer may be overlooked (false negative). Cancer screening accuracy is not 100%. If the cancer is in a hard-to-find location or if it is extremely small, then it may not be detected.

However, even if a cancer cannot be detected in a single screening, regular screenings increase the chance of detecting the cancer and avoiding death from cancer. For this reason, it is necessary to continue receiving cancer screenings at appropriate intervals, and not just as one-off visits.

### **False positives: the possibility of a "suspected cancer" diagnosis even if no cancer is present**

Even if you are diagnosed with "suspected cancer" and undergo a follow-up examination, your ultimate diagnosis may be "no cancer" (a false positive). Even if it is determined that a follow-up examination is necessary, the possibility of being diagnosed with cancer is only 1.50% for stomach cancer screenings and breast cancer screenings, which have the highest diagnosis rate, still only yield a cancer diagnosis 4.15% of the time.

### **Overdiagnosis: the possibility of diagnosing cancer that does not affect life**

Of the cancers that are found through screenings, there are cancers that do not develop into advanced cancers even if left untreated, and cancers that remain as they are and that do not affect life. Finding such cancers is referred to as "overdiagnosis." However, currently it is not possible to distinguish between non-life-threatening cancers and common cancers that are advanced and life-threatening.

(This document was created by referring to the websites of the Japan Cancer Society and the Japan Medical Association)

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Signature of doctor who provided the explanation

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I fully understand the advantages and disadvantages of cancer screenings that are listed above, and would like to be screened for cancer.

Date (YYYY/MM/DD): \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of individual to be screened for cancer