

Thymic Malignancies

Information for Patients,
Carers, and Health Care
Professionals



thymicUK

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Thymic Epithelial Tumours...

...are very rare malignant neoplasms originating from the thymus, a small organ in the upper part of the chest behind the sternum, normally responsible for appropriate function of the immune system.

There are three main types of thymic epithelial tumours, and the terminology often gets confused between them:

Thymomas

Thymomas are typically slow growing tumours that more or less resemble a normal thymus. Despite their usual favourable outcome, thymomas are malignant tumours as they can metastasize and/or recur. People diagnosed with thymoma often have other diseases of the immune system, most commonly MYASTHENIA GRAVIS, a disease in which the muscles become weak.

Thymic Carcinomas

In thymic carcinomas, the cells no longer look like normal thymic cells. Thymic carcinomas grow more quickly than thymomas and often have spread to other parts of the body when the cancer is found.

Thymic Neuroendocrine Tumours

Thymic neuroendocrine tumours are even less common than thymomas and thymic carcinomas. These tumours are also malignant.

How are they found?

Almost one-third of all thymic cancer patients have no noticeable symptoms when they are diagnosed. The thymic cancer is found by accident while doctors are looking for other things. Symptoms include:

- Pain in the chest
- Difficulty with breathing
- Long standing cough
- Weakness in the muscles

If you have any of these symptoms, your doctor may perform a chest CT (computed tomography) and/or MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan. A radiologist will analyse the scans searching for the tumour and will assess if it invades any structures. You might also be given a PET (positron emission tomography) scan that may be able to detect metastases (secondary tumours) in other organs.



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How These Cancers are Treated

Your treatment will depend on the type of your disease and its stage. The type of the disease is determined by a pathologist who analyses your tumour or its fragments under a microscope.

Treatment methods include:

- Surgery
- Radiation
- Chemotherapy

Thymomas, thymic carcinomas and thymic neuroendocrine tumours are very rare. Not all doctors are familiar with and may have to consult with other experts. Your case may need to be managed by a team including a thoracic surgeon, a radiation oncologist and/or medical oncologist, all working together with a radiologist and a pathologist experienced in thymic tumour diagnostics.

The chance of recovery or recurrence depends on several factors:

- The type of tumour
- How far the tumour has spread beyond the thymus into other tissues or organs
- Whether the tumour can be removed completely by surgery
- The patient's general health
- Whether the tumour has just been diagnosed or has recurred

You are not alone!

→ **ThymicUK** is a support and advocacy group for those affected by thymic cancers in the UK.



We aim to ...

- ... increase awareness and understanding of thymic cancers
- ... provide support for patients, family and carers
- ... address the feeling of isolation that accompanies a rare disease diagnosis
- ... facilitate research into thymic cancers
- ... improve access to more effective and/or safer treatments

Visit our website (thymicuk.org) for information and resources. Join our mailing list or Facebook Support Group (fb.com/groups/thymicuk).

→ **Neuroendocrine Cancer UK** aims to support and inform patients and families from diagnosis, enabling access to the best care and treatment, whilst stimulating Neuroendocrine Cancer research, increasing national awareness and influencing improvements in outcomes (neuroendocrinecancer.org.uk).



→ **International Thymic Malignancy Interest Group (ITMIG)** is a non-profit, academic organisation that provides structure and organisation for the advancement of clinical and basic science pertaining to thymic malignancies and related conditions. The ITMIG website (itmic.org) includes a patient's area with recordings of webinars prepared by physicians for patients.



→ **British Thoracic Oncology Group (BTOG)** is the multi-disciplinary group for healthcare professionals involved with thoracic malignancies throughout the UK (btog.org). BTOG has a thymic cancers special interest group; a multidisciplinary team of experts who work to assist health care practitioners in the UK by advising on thymic cancer cases.

Other international support groups include

→ **Foundation for thymic cancer research** (thymic.org)

→ **Thymoma Support Group** 

→ **Thymic Carcinoma Group** 