

Cholangiocarcinoma (CCA) (bile duct cancer)

Information for patients

The purpose of this leaflet is to help you and your family/friends understand more about Cholangiocarcinoma and may help answer some of the questions you have.

What is cholangiocarcinoma?

Cholangiocarcinoma (CCA) is a rare type of cancer that grows from the tissue in the bile ducts. CCA can develop at any part of the bile duct.

What is cancer?

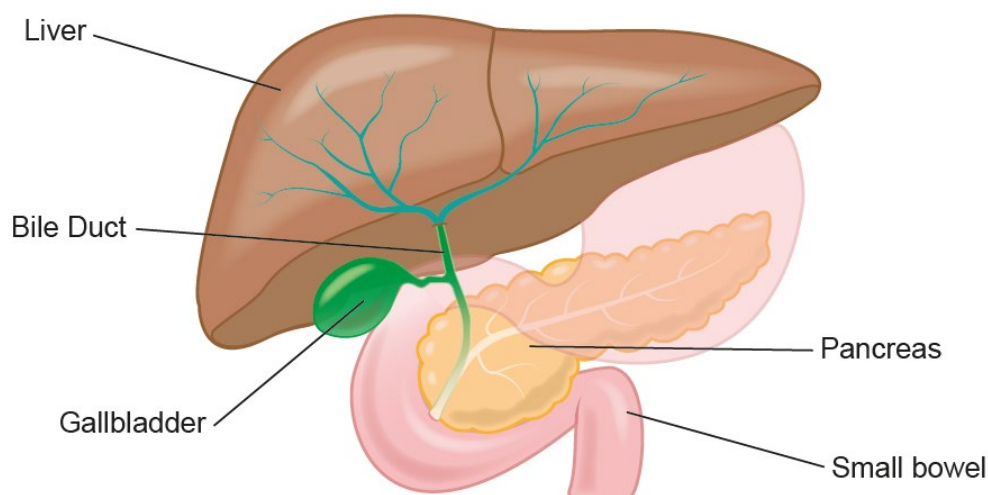
Our bodies are made up of tiny structures called cells that cannot be seen by the naked eye. Normally, these cells reproduce themselves by dividing in a regular fashion. When cell growth becomes abnormal and divides in an uncontrolled way, a cancer occurs. When a cancer forms in the body, cancer cells may break off and spread to nearby tissue and other parts of the body.

The biliary system and bile duct

The biliary system is part of your digestive system. Included in this is the gallbladder and bile ducts. You may hear it also called the 'biliary tree' because has a tree-like appearance, with a main trunk with branches leading off this.

Bile ducts are a network of tubes/branches that connect the liver and the gallbladder to the small bowel. Bile ducts carry bile, which is a fluid made in the liver and stored in the gallbladder. When we eat, the gallbladder releases bile which helps to break down the fat in the food we eat.

The right and left hepatic ducts, which start within the liver collect the bile and then come together just outside the liver to form the main common bile duct. This then transports the bile down to the small bowel.



Types of cholangiocarcinoma

Cholangiocarcinoma can grow in three main areas of the bile duct.

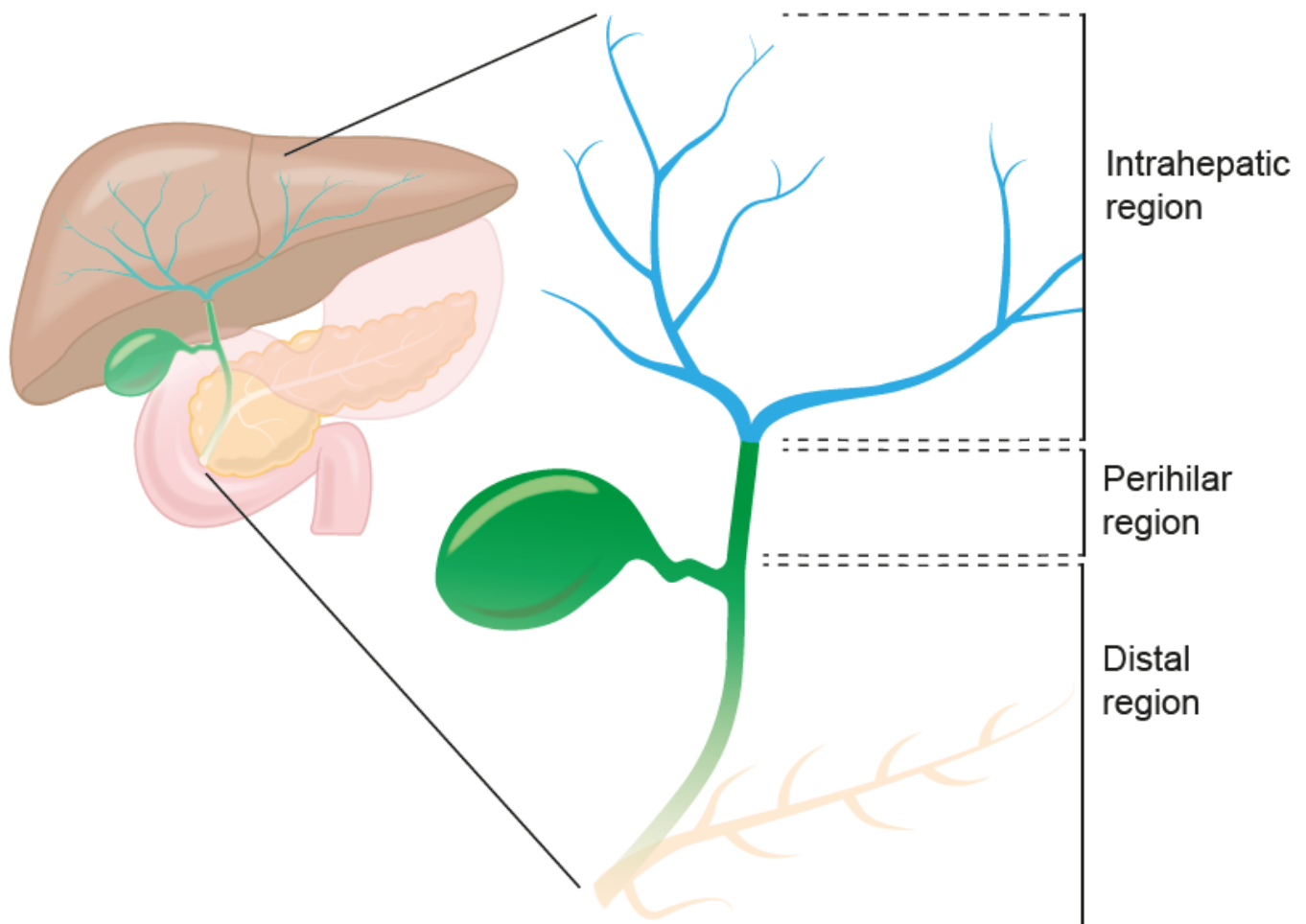
Intrahepatic CCA - This means the cancer grows within the bile ducts inside the liver.

Extrahepatic CCA - There are two types:

Perihilar CCA: This is where the cancer is found in the area where the main right and left hepatic ducts leave the liver and join to form a common hepatic duct.

Distal CCA: This is where the cancer develops outside the the liver further down the bile duct including the bile duct that passes through the pancreas into the small bowel.

Regions of the bile duct



What causes cholangiocarcinoma?

Cholangiocarcinoma is rare and the exact cause is not known but there are risk factors that can increase your risks of developing cholangiocarcinoma.

Liver and bile duct risks

- Primary Sclerosing (PSC) - a disease of the bile ducts. This is the most common risk factor
- Existing liver disease such as cirrhosis, fatty liver disease, hepatitis
- Bile duct stones
- Choledochal cyst
- Liver fluke - parasites which can cause infection in the liver (mostly seen in South-East Asia).

General risk factors

- UC - Ulcerative Colitis – Chronic inflammation of the bowel
- Obesity
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Age (more common in 65+ year olds)
- Exposure to chemicals
- Smoking.

Currently there is no routine screening program for patients with certain risk factors which may make them at higher risk of developing cholangiocarcinoma. There may be more frequent monitoring of their condition such as patients who have PSC.

Signs and symptoms of cholangiocarcinoma

Initially there may be no signs or symptoms of cholangiocarcinoma as it can grow slowly and spread gradually. Cholangiocarcinoma is often diagnosed at an advanced stage. Symptoms most often appear when the cholangiocarcinoma blocks a bile duct. This typically causes the bile duct to narrow which makes the bile back up into the blood stream causing jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

Sometimes symptoms can appear sooner which leads to an earlier diagnosis. If cancer is diagnosed at an earlier stage, there are more potential treatment options available.

Symptoms tend to develop depending upon whether the cancer is in the ducts inside the liver (intrahepatic) or ducts outside the liver (extrahepatic).

Symptoms

- Jaundice - the most common symptom of bile duct cancer
- Itching - excess bile in the skin can cause an itch which is a result of a build-up of bile salts under the skin that can cause an itch.
- Pale/floaty stools
- Dark urine
- Abdominal pain - early cancer rarely causes pain
- Loss of appetite and weight
- Fever/feeling shivery
- Nausea and vomiting.

Bile duct cancers are rare, and the above list of symptoms can be caused by other illnesses.
If you are concerned, please seek medical attention.

Contact Information

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Interpretation and Translation

Your GP will inform us of any interpreting requirements you have before you come to hospital, and we will provide an appropriate interpreter. If you are having this procedure as an existing in patient, staff will arrange interpreting support for you in advance of this procedure. This leaflet may be made available in a larger print, Braille or your community language.

