

# Experts debunk myths about how cancer spreads

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Experts from the Houston Methodist Cancer Center address some of the common misconceptions about how cancer spreads.

## Can getting a biopsy spread cancer?

Internet rumors have been circulating for years linking needle biopsies to spreading cancer. There is no evidence that a [needle biopsy](#), a procedure used to diagnose many [types of cancer](#), causes the cells to spread.

"Needle biopsies of early-onset lesions in the breast, thyroid or lung allow us to diagnose cancer often before it has spread," said Dr. Eric Bernicker, medical oncologist at Houston Methodist Cancer Center. "A needle biopsy can help your physician determine whether you have a malignancy and, if so, the best course of treatment."

Most surgeons are able to safely remove a small part of the tumor by using a small needle. Exceptions would be for tumors located in the eyes or in the testicles, where physicians require blood tests, imaging techniques or the removal of the entire tumor.

If cancer recurs after a biopsy, Bernicker says the underlying biology of the tumor cells is typically the cause.

"The tumor becomes released from the local structure and gains the ability to get into the body's circulation. This is what causes cancer to

spread and not the mechanical forces of the needle."

## Cancer and massage

Research continues to dispute the myth that massage causes the spread of [cancer cells](#) through the lymphatic system. Research also indicates oncology massage does not cause any more of an increase in blood flow than exercise and normal physical movement.

Many cancer centers offer [massage therapy](#) as a form of treatment to reduce symptoms related to chemotherapy and enhance the patient's quality of life. Trigger point therapy is encouraged to reduce nausea as a side effect of chemotherapy. Light massage strokes help reduce pain, muscle tension and mental stress.

Norma Reyna, massage therapist at Houston Methodist Hospital, says it is important to discuss options with your oncologist before beginning massage therapy. Cautionary measures should be taken to reduce possible risk of bruising and soreness.

- Adjusting massage pressure for each patient to avoid unnecessary bruising.
- Ensuring the patients will not have adverse reactions to lotions or oils.
- Avoiding aggressive massage therapies during cancer treatments, including deep tissue [massage](#) and sports massages.

## Does sugar feed cancer?

Sugar does not spread cancer. However, if you have too much sugar in your diet, specifically simple sugars found in bake goods, this can cause weight gain. Weight gain overtime can lead to obesity and obesity has been linked to an increase risk of several cancers. Sugar is a natural

substance that is found in all of our food and feeds all of our body's cells.

"Our bodies do need simple sugar, for energy," said Renee Stubbins, registered dietician at Houston Methodist Cancer Center. "The average American consumes over 130 pounds of sugar per year, or an extra 500 calories per day. The key to any healthy balanced diet is moderation," Stubbins said.

Natural occurring sugars like those found in fruit, vegetables and whole grain are all needed to help maintain muscle and weight during [cancer treatment](#) and have been shown to help fight [cancer](#). Avoiding processed sugars that are found in cakes, baked goods and desserts and sticking with fruits helps maintain a healthy weight and prevents health issues in the future.

Provided by Houston Methodist

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