

METASTASIS

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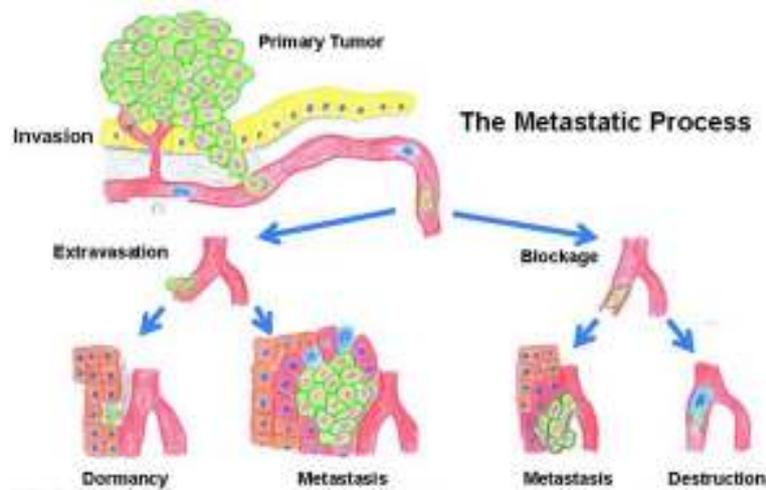
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Definition

Metastasis is the process of the spreading of a cancer or tumour to from its original site to other parts of the body. To complete the metastasis process the cancer will complete various steps before it becomes clinically detectable at the target sites.



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Steps of metastasis

The steps include:

- Separation from the primary tumour.
- Invasion through tissues around the initial lesion and penetration of their basement membranes.
- Entry into the blood vessels and survival within blood - spread via blood vessels is called haematogenous spread.

- Entry into lymphatics or peritoneal cavity - spread via lymph channels is called lymphatic spread.
- Reaching the distant organ like lungs, liver, brain bone etc.
- Formation of a new lesion along with new blood vessels feeding the tumour - formation of new blood vessels is termed angiogenesis.

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Routes of metastasis

There are four possible routes of spread of cancer, namely:

- 1) Spread via lymphatic channels - this is favoured by most carcinomas.
- 2) Spread via blood vessels - this is favoured by sarcomas and some carcinomas that originate in the kidneys - because of their thinner walls veins are more frequently invaded than arteries and the spread is via veins.
- 3) Spread via body cavities - the cancer cells seed onto peritoneal (covering the gut and stomach and other abdominal organs), pleural (covering the lungs), pericardial (covering the heart) or subarachnoid spaces (covering the brain) and membranes.
- 4) Transplantation of the cancer - this occurs by carriage of fragments of tumour cells via needles or surgical instruments to other parts of the body during surgery and diagnostic procedures.

End

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