

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

- [Make an Appointment](#)
- [Back](#)
- [Colon Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Request an Appointment & Treatment](#)
- [Refer a Patient](#)

- ABOUT US
- [Our mission, vision & core values](#)
 - [Leadership](#)
 - [History](#)
 - [Equality, diversity & inclusion](#)
 - [Annual report](#)
 - [Give to MSK](#)

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Available Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Eastern time)

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Treatment Options for Metastatic Colon Cancer

Colon cancer that has spread to other organs often requires a combination of different treatments. These may include:

- surgery
- chemotherapy
- image-guided therapies, such as MRI and CT
- radiation therapy
- targeted therapies and immunotherapy
- clinical trials



Danny's Story

Danny's colon cancer treatment was at a standstill. Then he came to us.

[Learn more](#)

Treatment Options for Colon Cancer That Has Spread to the Liver

Colon cancer most often spreads to the liver. This happens in part because the blood supply from the colon is connected to the liver through a large blood vessel.

To treat colon cancer that has spread to the liver, MSK specialists may use several options, often in combination. These include:

Surgery for Colon and Liver Tumors

MSK surgeons can often [remove tumors in both the colon and the liver](#) during the same procedure. This can reduce pain and shorten recovery time. If the cancer is advanced, chemotherapy and radiation therapy are sometimes used to shrink tumors before surgery. MSK surgeons operate on several hundred people with liver metastasis each year.

In some cases, a colostomy will be necessary. For this procedure, a surgeon cuts the colon above the level of the cancer and attaches the end to a surgical opening in the belly. Waste is collected from this opening and stored in a bag attached to the skin.

Chemotherapy

[Chemotherapy](#) is often combined with surgery and other therapies. It can be done at various times during your treatment:

Neoadjuvant therapy is done before surgery to shrink tumors or stop their growth.

Adjuvant therapy is done after surgery. It can help wipe out remaining cancer cells, lowering the risk of tumors coming back later.

[Hepatic arterial infusion \(HAI\)](#) is a kind of chemotherapy that is given through an IV. HAI delivers chemotherapy drugs to the liver through a tiny pump that is implanted under the skin in the lower abdomen. HAI delivers treatment directly where a tumor is located.

Interventional Radiology

[Interventional radiology treatments, such as ablation](#), use several forms of highly focused energy to shrink or destroy tumors. This can be done before or after surgery, or in place of surgery if it's not an option. These techniques are extremely precise. Sophisticated imaging tools, such as CT and PET/CT units, allow specialists to see what is happening inside the body during treatment.

These techniques are sometimes combined with a procedure called embolization. This involves injecting tiny particles to block or reduce blood flow to cancer cells, cutting off their nourishment.

Targeted Therapy

[Targeted therapies](#) attack specific genes and proteins in cancer cells.

Some drugs target a protein called VEGF. This protein helps tumors form new blood vessels to get the nutrients they need to grow.

Other drugs target EGFR. This protein helps fuel the growth of cancer cells.

A third drug type is known as a kinase inhibitor. It targets a protein that carries important signals to the cancer cell's control center. Blocking this protein can help stop the growth of cancer cells.

Targeted therapies work for only some people, depending on a variety of genetic factors.

Immunotherapy

[Immunotherapy](#) uses the body's own immune system to attack cancer cells.

Checkpoint inhibitors are drugs that unleash the immune's system powerful T cells to strike at the cancer. Some cancer cells make themselves invisible to the immune system by signaling that they are not harmful. Checkpoint inhibitors prevent this deception. These drugs allow T cells to see and attack a tumor.

Immunotherapy is an exciting new advance, but it helps only some people with colon cancer whose cancer cells have a specific genetic makeup.

Clinical Trials

As one of the premier cancer research institutions in the world, MSK may give you access to [clinical trials](#) testing new treatments. Talk to your care team to see if a clinical trial may be an option for you.

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