

What You Need to Know: Biliary Tract Cancers

What are Biliary Tract Cancers?

Biliary tract cancers (BTCs) are a group of **rare and aggressive gastrointestinal (GI) cancers** that form in different parts of the biliary tract system, including the bile ducts, liver, or gallbladder.^{1,2}

BTCs are rare diseases, impacting the system of ducts and passageways that help your body digest food and transport bile.³

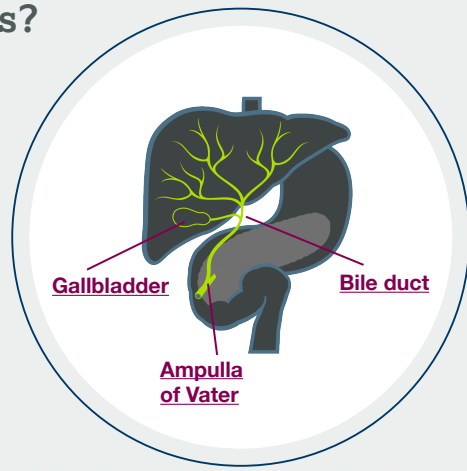


Image adapted from American Cancer Society³

There are three main types of BTCs: **gallbladder cancer, ampullary cancer and bile duct cancer.**

Bile duct cancer, also known as cholangiocarcinoma, includes intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma which originates in the liver and extrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma which originates in the bile ducts further away from the liver.²

Approximately 23,000 people in the US are diagnosed with BTCs each year.⁴

Why are BTCs so hard to diagnose?

Diagnosis and treatment for BTCs remain a major challenge for patients and their doctors. BTCs are typically diagnosed in advanced stages, as they often don't show symptoms in early disease.²

When symptoms do appear, they can be connected to other conditions, which can **delay diagnosis.**⁵

Signs and symptoms across all types of BTCs may include, but are not limited to⁵:



jaundice



light colored/
greasy stool



abdominal pain



nausea/
vomiting



loss of appetite
and weight loss

Why are BTCs so hard to treat?

As this is a rare disease with vague and non-specific signs and symptoms, BTCs can be difficult to diagnose. As a result, some individuals may also be misdiagnosed, leading to delays in an accurate diagnosis in later stages when outcomes are poor.³

The preferred treatment for BTCs is **surgery** to resect the cancer.² However, in most cases, the cancer has progressed and spread to other parts of the body (metastatic or advanced) meaning surgery isn't an option. These patients will often undergo **chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or targeted therapy.**

The standard of care option of chemotherapy has remained the same for over 10 years, with few treatment advancements in the space.²



surgery

60-70%

of patients are diagnosed with advanced disease, which is **unresectable** or has **spread** to other parts of the body.⁷



chemotherapy



radiation therapy



targeted therapy

While difficult to diagnose and treat this rare group of cancers, physicians and researchers are working to advance the science. Continued innovation has the potential to bring new hope for those living with BTCs.

References

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- 3 ACS. What is bile duct cancer? Available At: <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/bile-duct-cancer/about/what-is-bile-duct-cancer.html>. Accessed August 2022.
- 4 Marcano-Bonilla L, Mohamed EA, Mounajjed T, Roberts LR. Biliary tract cancers: epidemiology, molecular pathogenesis and genetic risk associations. *Chin Clin Oncol*. 2016;5(5):61.
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- 6 ACS. Treatment options based on the extent of bile duct cancer. Available At: <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/bile-duct-cancer/treating/based-on-situation.html>. Accessed August 2022.
- 7 Valle JW, Lamarca A, Goyal L, Barriuso J, Zhu AX. New horizons for precision medicine in biliary tract cancers. *Cancer Discov*. 2017;7(9):943-962.