



Sarcoma/Bone Cancer Awareness



"Sarcoma and Bone Cancer Awareness: The “Forgotten Cancers”

While cancer continues to impact residents throughout The Bahamas, sarcoma remains one of the least understood and rarely discussed forms of the disease. Often referred to as the “forgotten cancer,” sarcoma is a rare but serious group of cancers that cause debilitating pain and significantly reduce quality of life.

What Is Sarcoma?

According to the Cleveland Clinic, sarcoma develops when cells—due to genetic changes—grow abnormally in bones and connective tissues such as muscles, fat, tendons, cartilage, blood vessels, and nerves. Though rare, sarcomas make up about **1% of adult** and **15% of childhood cancer diagnoses**.

Because bones and connective tissues are found throughout the body, sarcomas can appear nearly anywhere. The distribution is as follows:

- **40%** in the legs, ankles, and feet

- **15%** in the shoulders, arms, wrists, and hands
- **30%** in the chest wall, abdomen, and pelvis
- **15%** in the head and neck

Types of Sarcoma

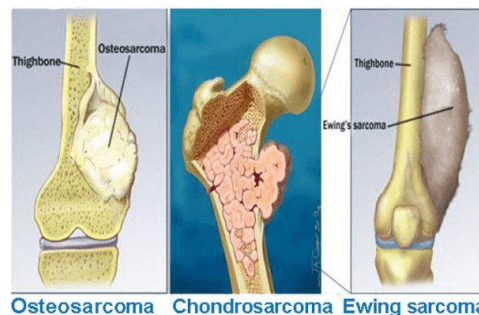
There are two main categories of sarcomas:

Bone Sarcomas (Primary Bone Cancer)

These originate directly in the bone and, with early detection, can often be successfully treated. If cancer spreads to the bone from elsewhere (like the lungs, breast, or prostate), it's called **secondary bone cancer** or **bone metastases**.

Common types include:

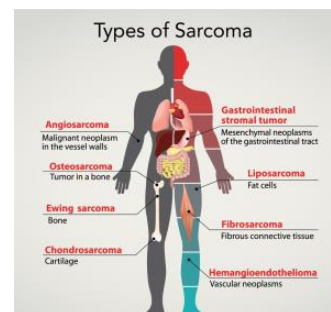
- Osteosarcoma (most common)
- Chondrosarcoma
- Ewing's sarcoma
- Chordoma
- Fibrosarcoma



Soft Tissue Sarcomas

These begin in connective tissues and are more common in adults, though some affect children. Examples include:

- Angiosarcoma
- Gastrointestinal stromal tumors (GIST)
- Leiomyosarcoma
- Rhabdomyosarcoma
- Desmoplastic small round cell tumors



Common Symptoms

Symptoms vary by type and location, but may include:

- A new or growing lump (painful or painless)
- Persistent pain (especially in limbs, pelvis, or back)
- Swelling or stiffness
- Unexplained weight loss
- Limited range of motion or limping

Risk Factors

Though the exact cause is unknown, the Cleveland Clinic lists these contributing factors:

- **Radiation exposure** from prior cancer treatments
- **Chemical exposure** (e.g., arsenic, herbicides, plastics)
- **Lymphedema** (chronic swelling in limbs)
- **Inherited genetic syndromes**, like Gardner or Werner syndromes

Diagnosis

Physicians typically begin with a physical exam and may order:

- **X-rays, CT scans, or MRIs** for imaging
- **Bone scans** and **PET scans** for abnormalities
- **Biopsy**, the gold standard for diagnosis, which involves testing tissue samples under a microscope

Treatment Options

Sarcoma treatment requires a multidisciplinary team and may include:

- **Surgery** – removing the tumor with a margin of healthy tissue
- **Radiation therapy** – targeting cancer cells with high-energy rays
- **Chemotherapy** – using drugs to stop or slow cancer growth
- **Targeted therapy** – attacking specific cancer cells
- **Immunotherapy** – boosting the immune system to fight cancer
- **Thermal ablation** – destroying tumors using extreme heat or cold

In severe cases, **amputation** may be necessary if other treatments cannot preserve the affected limb.

Can It Be Prevented?

There is no screening test for sarcoma, but steps to reduce risk include:

- Limiting exposure to radiation and chemicals
- Exercising regularly
- Eating a balanced diet
- Attending regular medical checkups

How the Cancer Society of The Bahamas Helps

The Cancer Society provides education, support, and access to early detection tools to empower Bahamians in the fight against cancer. Services include:

- **The Cancer Caring Centre** – Free accommodations in Nassau for Family Islanders receiving treatment
- **Adult Support Group** – Mental and emotional support

- **Freedom Kids Club** – Tailored activities and emotional care for children diagnosed with cancer
- **Medical Assistance** – Provision of port-a-caths and port needles

To learn more or support the cause, visit www.cancersocietybahamas.org/newsletter, call (242) 323-4441 / 325-2483, or email info@cancersocietybahamas.org.

Together, we can raise awareness, offer support, and save lives—one step at a time.