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Melanoma Guide – Patients and Relatives

H. The importance of the tumor stage

A cancer is also referred to as a tumor disease. The disease can be diagnosed at an early, i.e. localized, or at an advanced stage.

In order to record the stage, further examinations -staging- are carried out and then the tumor stage is determined. This is done according to an international classification, the so-called TNM classification according to the rules of the UICC (Union Internationale Contre le Cancer), international union against cancer.

T stands for tumor. It describes the local extent of the tumor on the respective organ, i.e. the primary tumor. T0 means a very early stage, T1-3 are usually limited to the organ, at T4 the tumor grows into the neighboring organs.

N is an abbreviation for node. It provides information about the local and the lymph nodes affected further away by the primary tumor. N0 means no lymph node involvement, N1-3 lymph nodes increasingly removed from the tumor are affected.

M stands for metastases, i.e. metastases of the primary tumor into other organs. M0 means no metastases and M1 means metastases to other organs.

As already mentioned, the assignment to the respective tumor stage is based on the TNM classification. In addition to the assessment of the chances of recovery, the tumor stage is the basis for the therapy recommendation, such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy or even the combination of several therapies. The therapy recommendations issued by the respective medical societies, the so-called "guidelines", are also based on the tumor stage. One speaks of the standard therapy for the tumor stage, based on the best currently available knowledge.

There is a lot of further information on malignant melanoma (also called black skin cancer), in paper form as well as especially on the Internet. It is important to check that it is up-to-date. We generally refer to the portal of the German Cancer Society for all tumor diseases: www.krebsgesellschaft.de/onko-internetportal.