The stomach is a hollow organ located in the upper middle area of the abdomen. It starts at bottom of the breast bone and is located behind the rib cage. When you swallow food, it travels down the esophagus into the stomach.

The wall of the stomach has many layers. The innermost layer (called the mucosa) has glands that make juices to help digest food. Most stomach cancers begin in this layer.

What the Stomach Does

The stomach prepares swallowed food and liquid for digestion by mixing them with acid and enzymes. This creates a thick liquid called chyme. Muscles in the stomach wall push chyme into the small intestine for digestion.

About Stomach Tumors

Throughout the body, new cells form to replace old, dead cells all the time. Sometimes new cells form when the body does not need them, or old cells do not die when they should. Extra cells can build up and form a mass of tissue called a growth or tumor. Tumors can be benign or malignant.

**Benign tumors** are not cancer. Often, doctors can remove them and in most cases, benign tumors do not come back after they are removed. Their cells do not spread to other parts of the body. Most important, benign tumors are rarely a threat to life.

**Malignant tumors** are cancer. They are usually more serious and may be life-threatening. Cancer cells can invade nearby tissues and organs. Cancer cells can also break away from the tumor and enter the bloodstream or lymphatic system. That is how they spread from the original (primary) tumor to form new tumors in other organs. The spread of cancer is called metastasis.

Cancer and the Stomach

Cancer that starts in the stomach is called gastric cancer.

When cancer grows in the stomach, one or more of these symptoms may occur:

- Discomfort or pain in the stomach area
- Difficulty swallowing
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weight loss
- Feeling full or bloated after a small meal
- Vomiting blood or having blood in the stool

These symptoms do not necessarily mean stomach cancer. Other health problems can cause these symptoms. Anyone with these symptoms should see a doctor as soon as possible.