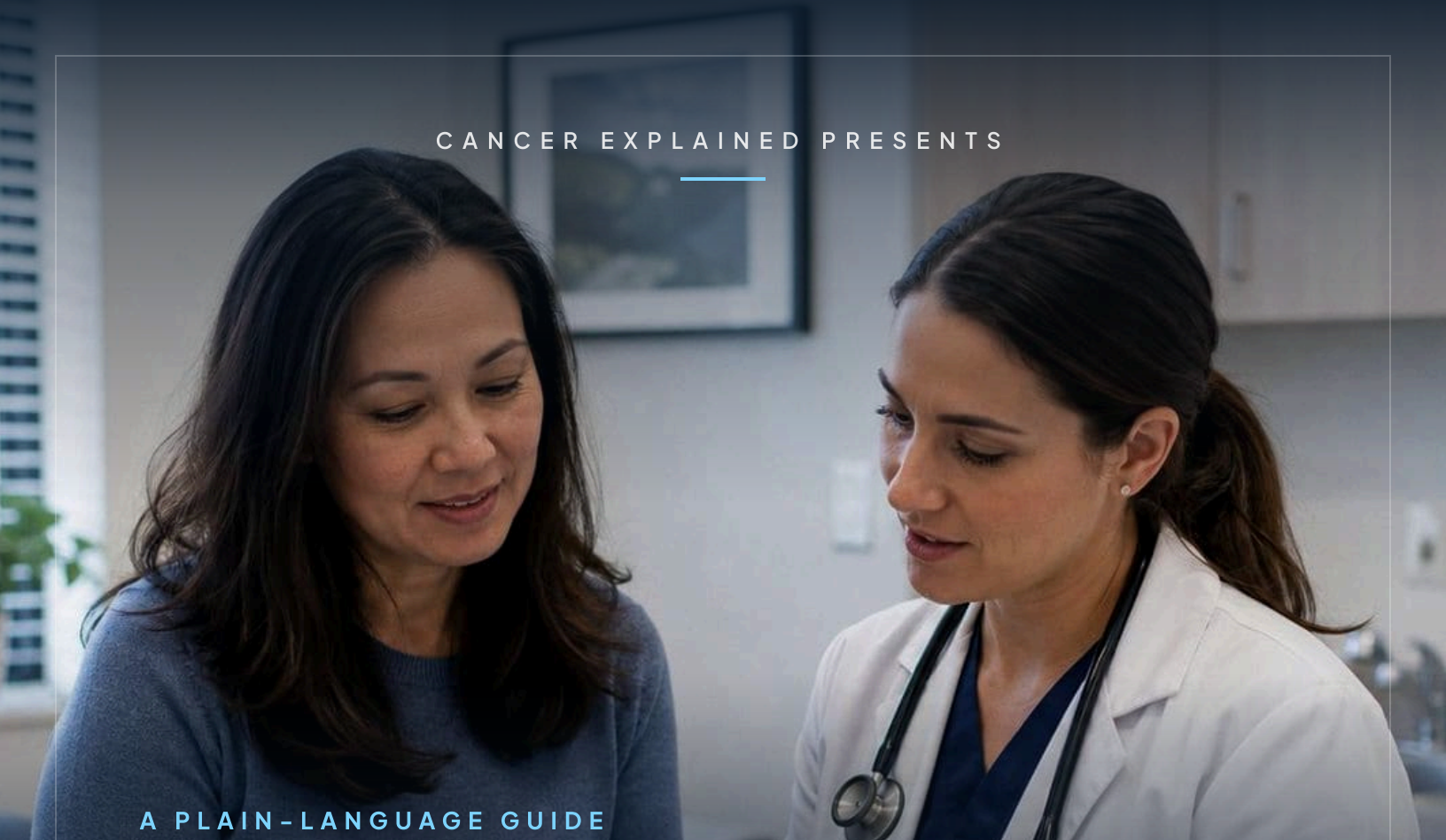
CANCER EXPLAINED PRESENTS



A PLAIN-LANGUAGE GUIDE

# MAKING SENSE OF SCAN AND TEST RESULTS

*What the common words on a scan or lab result usually mean*

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**A CANCER EXPLAINED HANDOUT** · BASED ON **NCI** · UPDATED **2026-07-14**

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# Making Sense of Scan and Test Results

*What the common words on a scan or lab result usually mean*

## 1 Words about size and spread

- ☐ Lesion or mass: a spot the scan can see — it is not automatically cancer.
- ☐ Stable: little or no change since the last scan.
- ☐ Progression: the cancer has grown or spread since the last scan.
- ☐ Response: the cancer has shrunk or there is less of it.

## 2 Words that sound worse than they are

- ☐ Unremarkable: normal — nothing concerning was seen.
- ☐ No evidence of disease (NED): tests find no detectable cancer right now.
- ☐ Incidental finding: something unrelated the scan happened to notice.
- ☐ Cannot be excluded: the scan cannot rule it out — more testing may follow.

## 3 What to do with a result

- ☐ One scan is a snapshot — your team reads it alongside your other results.
- ☐ Ask what the result changes, if anything, about your plan.
- ☐ Ask for a copy, and write down any word you want explained.

THE BOTTOM LINE

**A report is written for clinicians, not patients. A scary-sounding word does not always mean bad news — ask your team what it means for you.**

**Sources:** NCI: Understanding cancer prognosis and test results (cancer.gov/about-cancer/diagnosis-staging/prognosis)

**Learn more in plain language:** cancerexplained.org/reports · **Updated:** 2026-07-14

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