

## Margins

**Margins**, also known as "**margins of resection**," refer to the distance between a tumor and the edge of the surrounding tissue that's removed along with it.

When a tumor is removed, some tissue surrounding it is also removed. The tumor with surrounding tissue is rolled in special ink so that the outer edges, or margins, are clearly visible under a microscope. The tissue is checked under a microscope to see if the margins are free of cancer cells. Depending upon what is seen, the margins of a tumor are described as:

- **Positive margins:** Cancer cells extend out to the edge of the tissue, where the ink is.
- **Negative margins:** No cancer cells are found in the ink. (Sometimes negative margins are called clean margins)
- **Close margins:** Any situation that falls between positive and negative is considered "close."

It is important to remove a margin of cancer-free tissue completely surrounding the original tumor, to try to be sure that all the cancer is gone. This is referred to as "**clearing the margins**."

Knowing how close cancer cells are to the edge of the removed tissue helps in making the right treatment decisions. This is especially important in deciding whether additional surgery is needed. If the margins are positive, more surgery is needed. If the margins are close, you may or may not need more surgery. If the margins are negative, you probably don't need more surgery. The definition of "negative margins" varies from one hospital to another. You may want to ask your doctor whether your margins were positive, negative, or close, and how your doctor defines "negative".