

Metaplasia (Greek: "change in form") is the reversible transformation of one differentiated cell type to another differentiated cell type. The change from one type of cell to another may be part of a normal maturation process, or caused by some sort of abnormal stimulus. In simplistic terms, it is as if the original cells are not robust enough to withstand their environment, so they transform into another cell type better suited to their environment. If the stimulus causing metaplasia is removed or ceases, tissues return to their normal pattern of differentiation. Metaplasia is not synonymous with **dysplasia**, and is not considered to be an actual cancer.

It is also contrasted with heteroplasia, which is the spontaneous abnormal growth of cytologic and histologic elements. Today, metaplastic changes are usually considered to be an early phase of carcinogenesis, specifically for those with a history of cancers or who are known to be susceptible to carcinogenic changes. Metaplastic change is often viewed as a premalignant condition that requires immediate intervention, either surgical or medical, because metaplasia is associated with cancer.

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