

## Colorectal Cancer - Questions to Ask the Doctor [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 09/2014

**ON THIS PAGE:** You will find some questions to ask your doctor or other members of your health care team, to help you better understand your diagnosis, treatment plan, and overall care. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

Talking often with the doctor is important [3] to make informed decisions about your health care. These suggested questions are a starting point to help you learn more about your cancer care and treatment. You are also encouraged to ask additional questions that are important to you. You may want to print this list and bring it to your next appointment, or download Cancer.Net's free mobile app [4] for an e-list and other interactive tools to manage your care.

### General

- Where exactly is the cancer located?
- What are my treatment options based on my diagnosis?
- What clinical trials are open to me? Where are they located, and how do I find out more about them?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- Who will be part of my health care team, and what does each member do?
- Who will be coordinating my overall treatment and follow-up care?
- What are the risks and possible side effects of treatment, both in the short term and the long term?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- Could this treatment affect my sex life? If so, how and for how long?
- Could this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children? If so, should I talk with a fertility specialist before cancer treatment begins?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- What support services are available to me? To my family?
- Whom should I call for questions or problems?
- Does my diagnosis mean that my relatives have a higher risk of colorectal cancer? Should they talk with their doctors about screening?

## Before surgery

- What do you know about my cancer at this point?
- What other tests will be done before surgery?
- Can you describe the surgery I will be having?
- What are you planning to remove during surgery (the colon, rectum, lymph nodes)?
- Is a biopsy part of the surgery?
- How soon after surgery will I have all test results and a firm diagnosis?
- Do you think I may need a temporary or permanent colostomy?
- Is this the standard type of surgery for my condition?
- How many times have you performed this type of operation successfully?
- Who will give me information about how I should get ready for surgery and a hospital stay?  
How long will I be in the hospital?
- How will my pain be controlled after surgery?
- What other side effects are possible with this type of surgery?

## For rectal cancer

- Should I have radiation therapy and chemotherapy before my rectal cancer surgery?

## After surgery

- What is my diagnosis based on the results of surgery and biopsy reports, in TNM format?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- Did the pathologist test my tumor for a possible genetic cause? Do I need more genetic counseling or testing?
- What is my prognosis?
- How will additional treatment after surgery affect my prognosis?
- What additional treatment do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment?
- Is it a standard treatment or part of a clinical trial?
- How long will it be before I can go back to work after surgery? Can I work during chemotherapy?
- What follow-up tests will I need, and how often will I need them?

## Question related to a colostomy (if needed)

- Will you refer me to a specially trained nurse to decide on the best place for my colostomy and help me learn to manage it after the surgery?

*The next section offers some more resources that may be helpful to you. Use the menu on the side of your screen to select Additional Resources, or you can select another section, to continue reading this guide.*

---

### Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/colorectal-cancer/questions-ask-doctor>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24958>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/29951>