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PDF generated on May 29, 2016 from
http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/head-and-neck-cancer/questions-ask-doctor

Head and Neck Cancer - Questions to Ask the Doctor [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 05/2015

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.

Questions to ask after getting a diagnosis

- What type of head and neck cancer do I have?
- Where is the tumor located?
- What stage is the cancer? What does this mean?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- Is it important to find out whether the tumor was caused by HPV? Why or why not?

- Should I get an additional consultation or second opinion?

Questions to ask about choosing a treatment and managing side effects

- What are my treatment options?
- 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?
- What are the possible side effects of this treatment, both in the short term and the long term?
- Who will be part of my health care team, and what does each member do?
- Who will be coordinating my overall treatment?
- Can you recommend an oncologic dentist?
- Should I see a speech pathologist before starting treatment?
- 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?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Questions to ask about having surgery

- Is surgery necessary, or can chemotherapy and radiation therapy be used to eliminate the cancer?
- What type of surgery do you recommend?
- Will any lymph nodes need to be removed? If so, what type of neck dissection will be done? What does this mean?
- How long will the operation take?
- How long will I be in the hospital?
- Can you describe what my recovery from surgery will be like?
- What are the possible long-term effects of having this surgery?
- Will this surgery affect my speech or ability to chew and swallow?
- How will this surgery affect my appearance?
- Will I need to have reconstructive surgery to replace lost tissue?

Questions to ask about having radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or targeted therapy

- What type of treatment is recommended?
- What is the goal of this treatment?
- How will this treatment be given?
- Will this treatment be given at a hospital, clinic, or in my home?
- How long will I need to continue this treatment?
- What side effects can I expect during treatment?
- What are the possible long-term effects of having this treatment?
- What can be done to prevent or manage these side effects?

Questions to ask about planning follow-up care

- Will I need physical therapy, speech therapy, and/or another type of rehabilitation after finishing treatment?
- What is the risk of the cancer returning? Are there signs and symptoms I should watch for?
- What long-term side effects or late effects are possible based on the cancer treatment I received?
- What follow-up tests will I need, and how often will I need them?
- How do I get a treatment summary and survivorship care plan to keep in my personal records?

- Who will be coordinating my follow-up care?

- What survivorship support services are available to me? To my family?

The next section in this guide is Additional Resources [5], and it offers some more resources on this website beyond this guide that may be helpful to you. Or, use the menu on the side of your screen to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/head-and-neck-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
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/18921