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PDF generated on July 28, 2016 from <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/melanoma/questions-ask-doctor>

Melanoma - Questions to Ask the Doctor [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board \[2\]](#), 09/2015

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 or subtype of melanoma do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report to me?
- What stage is the melanoma? What does this mean?
- What is the depth of the melanoma in millimeters?
- Is the melanoma ulcerated?

- Does the melanoma have mitotic activity?
- Is it likely that the melanoma has spread? Why or why not?

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 each treatment option, both in the short term and the long term? Is there anything we can do to prevent them?
- Who will be part of my health care team, and what does each member do?
- Who will be coordinating my overall treatment?
- How will each 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

- What type of surgery do you recommend?
- Should I have a sentinel lymph node biopsy to find out if there is spread to the lymph nodes?
- Will surgery be able to remove all of the cancer? Will I need additional surgery?
- How long will the operation take?
- How long will I be in the hospital?
- After the surgical removal of the melanoma, will I need a skin graft?
- Can you describe what my recovery from surgery will be like?
- What are the possible long-term effects of having this surgery?
- Will I need to have any additional treatment after surgery?

Questions to ask about having adjuvant or systemic treatment

- What type of treatment is recommended?
- Does my melanoma have a *BRAF* mutation or other known mutation? Is targeted therapy or immunotherapy an option?

- What is the goal of this treatment?
- How long will it take to give 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?

Additional questions for people with stage III melanoma

- How many lymph nodes are affected with melanoma?
- Will the remainder of the lymph nodes be removed? If yes, what are the potential complications of lymph node surgery?
- Is there any extracapsular extension of the melanoma (that is, has the melanoma spilled out of the lymph node)? What does this mean?
- Is radiation therapy or other treatment recommended after surgery?
- What are the goals of each treatment? What is my prognosis?

Additional questions for people with stage IV melanoma

- Where has the melanoma spread? Is a brain scan or PET scan necessary to determine where it has spread?
- Is surgical removal of the metastases an option, especially if one or two tumors are present? If so, what are the benefits and risks?
- What are the goals of each treatment? What is my prognosis?

- How will side effects and symptoms be prevented and managed, to reduce my discomfort and increase my quality of life?

Questions to ask about planning follow-up care

- What is the risk of the cancer returning? Are there signs and symptoms I should watch for?
- What steps can I take to reduce the risk of developing a new melanoma or other type of skin cancer?
- What long-term side effects or late effects are possible based on the 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?
- Are my family members at a higher risk for developing melanoma?

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/melanoma/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/19265>