Melanoma - Questions to Ask the Doctor [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 06/2014

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.

For patients with newly diagnosed skin melanoma

- Can you explain my pathology report to me?
- What stage of melanoma do I have? What is the depth, in millimeters, of the melanoma? Is the melanoma ulcerated? Does my melanoma have mitotic activity?
- Is it likely that the melanoma has spread? Why or why not?
- What are my treatment options?
- Will surgery be able to remove all of the cancer? Will I need additional surgery?
- After the surgical removal of the melanoma, will I need a skin graft?
- Should I have a sentinel lymph node biopsy to find out if there is spread to the lymph nodes?
- 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 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?
- 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?
- Is the cancer likely to recur following treatment? What steps can I take to reduce the risk of additional new melanomas?
- What follow-up tests will I need, and how often will I need them?
- What support services are available to me? To my family?
- Whom should I call for questions or problems?
- Are my family members at a higher risk of melanoma?

Additional questions for patients 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 patients 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?

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/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