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http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/diagnosing-cancer/questions-ask-your-health-care-team

Questions to Ask Your Health Care Team [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 03/2016

Learning more about your diagnosis and treatment plan helps you take an active role in planning your cancer care [3]. Studies show that people with cancer who are well informed about their disease and treatment options usually have better outcomes and fewer side effects than those who simply follow doctors' orders. However, some people feel overwhelmed by too much information and do not want to know too many details. Decide how much information you want, and share your preferences with your health care team and caregivers.

Tips to help you get your questions answered

Your health care team should make time to explain the treatment options and answer your questions. Here are some tips to help you communicate better with the members of that team:

- Consider writing your questions down before your appointment. This can lower your stress level and help you make the most of your visit. You may want to print the list of questions below to bring to your next appointment. Or you can download Cancer.Net's free mobile app [4] for a list of questions and other interactive tools to manage your care.

- Bring a notebook or a tape recorder to the appointment. During the appointment, write down the answers or make an audio recording. You can also ask a family member or friend to record them for you. This will allow you to read or listen to the information later and take the time you need to process it.

- Tell your health care team if you are having trouble understanding an explanation or certain medical words. Sometimes they may be able to draw a picture or give an example that would help you understand.

- Let your doctor know if you are interested in seeking a second opinion [5]. Most doctors understand the value of a second opinion. And your current doctor may even be able to recommend another doctor.

- Ask your health care team where you can find additional information or printed materials about your condition. Many offices have this information readily available.

- Talk with your health care team about information you have found on the Internet or in books or magazines. Not all information is accurate and reliable. Learn more about evaluating cancer information on the Internet [6].

Potential questions to ask your health care team

Asking questions is an important part of managing your care. The questions you choose should be based on your unique needs and interests, and those questions may change over time.

Consider the following questions as you decide what you want to ask your health care team:

General information

- What type of cancer [7] do I have?

- Where is it located?

- What are the risk factors for this disease?

- Is this type of cancer caused by genetic factors [8]? Are other members of my family at risk?

- What lifestyle changes—such as diet, exercise, and rest—should I make to be healthy before, during, and after treatment?

- Where can I find more information about this type of cancer?

Symptoms

- What are some common symptoms of this type of cancer?
- How can I prevent or manage them?
- What are the treatment options for my symptoms?
- Will certain activities make my symptoms worse?
- What should I do if I notice new symptoms or if existing symptoms worsen?

Diagnosis

- What diagnostic tests or procedures [9] will I need? How often?
- Where will I go to have the tests or procedures?
- How can I prepare for them?
- What will we learn from the tests or procedures?
- When will I get the results, and how will I receive them?
- What does my pathology report [10] tell us about the cancer?
- Will I need to repeat any tests or procedures if I seek a second opinion?
- How and when should I communicate with loved ones [11] about my diagnosis?

Staging

- What is the stage [12] of the cancer? What does this mean?

- Has cancer spread to my lymph nodes or any other parts of my body?
- How is staging used to help decide the best type of cancer treatment?
- What is my chance of recovery?

Treatment

- What are my treatment options [13]?
- Which treatments, or combination of treatments, do you recommend? Why?
- What is the goal of the treatment? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- What clinical trials are available for me? Where are they located? How do I find out more about them?
- Who will be part of my cancer care team [14]? What does each person do?
- How much experience do you or other members of the cancer care team have treating this type of cancer?
- Will I need to stay in the hospital for treatment? Or will this treatment happen in an outpatient clinic?
- What is the expected timeline for my treatment? Do I need it immediately?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- What are the short- and long-term side effects of this treatment?
- Could this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children? If so, should I

talk with a fertility specialist [15] before cancer treatment begins?

- How will you treat side effects [16] that I experience during treatment?
- How can I keep myself as healthy as possible during treatment?

Clinical trials

- What are clinical trials [17]?
- How do clinical trials help people with cancer?
- What happens during a clinical trial?
- What are the benefits and risks of participating in a clinical trial?
- How will I be cared for during the clinical trial?
- What are my responsibilities during the clinical trial?
- Are there any costs associated with my participation in a clinical trial?
- Where can I learn more about clinical trials?

Find more questions to ask the research team [18] when considering a clinical trial.

Support

- What support services are available to me? To my family?
- May I contact you or the nurse if I have other questions?
- Whom should I call with questions or concerns during non-business hours?

- Can you recommend a social worker to help locate support services?
- Where can I find resources for children [19]? For teenagers [20]? For young adults [21]? For older adults [22]?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs [23] of cancer care, who can help me?
- Who handles health insurance [24] concerns in your office?

Follow-up care

- What is the chance that the cancer will come back? Should I watch for specific signs or symptoms?
- What long-term side effects or late effects are possible based on the cancer treatment I received?
- What follow-up tests will I need? 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 leading my follow-up care?
- What survivorship support services are available to me? To my family?

For more questions, see the "Questions to Ask the Doctor" section of each cancer type [7].

More Information

Cancer Basics [25]

Managing Your Care [26]

Questions to Ask When Making Appointments [27]

Links

[1] http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/diagnosing-cancer/questions-ask-your-health-care-team
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24669
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/29951
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/25355
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24514
[7] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/24864
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