

Questions to Ask the Doctor [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 07/2014

Key Messages:

- Asking questions about your cancer care helps you become better informed and may help you cope with your diagnosis.
- Think about how much information you would like to know about your type of cancer, and let your doctor know your preferences.
- Use the following list of questions to generate ideas; only use the questions that you believe would help you, and feel free to overlook those that wouldn't.
- Consider writing down your questions before the appointment.

Learning more about your diagnosis and treatment plan gives you the ability to take an active role in your cancer care planning [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 many details about their condition. Think about how much information you would like to learn, and share your preferences with your caregivers.

Tips to help you get your questions answered

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

- Consider writing your questions down before your appointment, which can lower your stress level and help you make the most of your visit.
- Bring a notebook or a tape recorder to the appointment. During the appointment, write down your doctor's answers, ask a family member or friend to write them down for you, or make an audio recording. That will allow you to read or listen to the information later, taking the time you need to process it.
- Tell your doctor if you are having trouble understanding an explanation or unfamiliar medical words. Sometimes, the doctor 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 [4]. Most doctors understand the value of a second opinion, and your current doctor may even be able to recommend another doctor.

- Ask your doctor or nurse 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](#) [5].

Potential questions to ask the doctor

Asking your doctor questions is an important part of [managing your care](#) [6]. You will choose to ask specific questions 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 doctor:

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?
- How many people are diagnosed with this type of cancer each year?
- What lifestyle changes, such as diet, exercise, and rest, do you recommend I make to stay as healthy as possible before, during, and after treatment?
- Where can I find more information about my 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 new symptoms arise or existing ones 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 myself for them?
- What will we learn from the tests or procedures?
- When will I get the results, and how will I receive them? For example, will I receive them over the phone or at my next appointment?
- What does my [pathology report](#) [10] (laboratory test results) tell us about my cancer?
- Will I need to repeat any tests or procedures if I seek a second opinion?
- How and when would you recommend I [communicate with loved ones](#) [11] about my diagnosis?

Staging

- What is the stage [12] of my 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 prognosis, also called 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 you are recommending? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- What clinical trials (research studies involving volunteers) are open to me? Where are they located, and how do I find out more about them?
- Who will be part of my cancer care team [14], and what does each member do?
- How much experience do you? or other members of the cancer care team? have treating this type of cancer?
- Will I need to be hospitalized for treatment, or will this treatment happen in an outpatient clinic?
- What is the expected timeline for my treatment? Do I need treatment 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?
- Will this treatment affect my fertility [15] (ability to become pregnant or father children)?
- 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?
- Are any clinical trials treatment options for me?
- What happens during a clinical trial?
- What are the benefits and risks of participating in a clinical trial?
- How will I be monitored while participating in a 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 additional 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] related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- Who handles health insurance [24] concerns in your office?

Follow-up care

- What follow-up tests will I need, and how often will I need them?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

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

More Information

Navigating Cancer Care [25]

Links:

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/diagnosing-cancer/questions-ask-doctor>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24669>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25355>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24514>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25015>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types>
- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24864>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24959>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24715>
- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25112>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25070>
- [13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25071>
- [14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24957>
- [15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25240>
- [16] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25282>
- [17] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24863>
- [18] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24881>
- [19] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25114>
- [20] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25116>
- [21] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25117>
- [22] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25115>
- [23] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24865>
- [24] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24918>
- [25] <http://www.cancer.net/node/11>