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Oncologist-approved cancer information from the American Society of Clinical Oncology

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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 of your doctors and nurses helps you feel more involved in your cancer care.
- Considering writing down the questions you want to ask ahead of time, and writing down the answers.
- Ask for an explanation of anything you don’t understand.

Asking questions of your doctor, nurses, and other members of the health care team is a good way to learn more about your treatment and follow-up care. In fact, doctors and nurses like to know what concerns their patients have and what topics may be confusing. Asking questions helps give you more control over your care and cope with cancer and cancer treatment. Here are some tips to make talking with your doctor easier:

- Let your parents (or guardians) know that you want to be involved ahead of time so they can make sure you're included.
- Think of questions to ask the doctor before your appointment and make sure you ask them.
- Ask for an explanation if you hear something you don't understand.
- If you have a suggestion or preference about your care, let your doctors or nurses know—maybe you want to delay a round of chemotherapy, so you can go to a party or ball game. The answer may be "yes," but you won't know if you don't ask.
- If there are things you would rather not know, or would rather not know right now, let your doctors and nurses know that also.

Below are some sample questions you may want to consider asking your doctor. You may want

to print this list and bring it to your next appointment, or download Cancer.Net's free mobile app [3] for a list you can bring with you on your smartphone.

General questions

- What type of cancer do I have? What does that mean?
- Where is it located?
- Can you explain my pathology report (or laboratory or other test results) to me?
- Where can I find more information about this type of cancer?

Symptoms

- How will this treatment affect how I feel or how I look?
- How can I avoid these changes?
- Is there anything I can do to make me feel better?
- Are there activities I should avoid that may make me feel worse?

Diagnosis

- Do I need other tests or procedures? When do I need those? How often will I need them?
- Are there any tests or procedures that may hurt or be uncomfortable? Are there ways to lessen the pain or make me feel more comfortable during the tests?
- What will these tests tell me about the cancer?

Treatment

- Would you explain my treatments options?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why? Are there other treatment options for this type of cancer?
- What clinical trials are open to me? Where are they located, and how do my family and I find out more about them?
- What are the possible side effects of each treatment option, both in the short term and long term and what can we do to make them better?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to get rid of the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- Can this treatment harm my chances of having children (this is called fertility)?
- Are there steps I can take to help protect my fertility?
- Should I see a doctor who specializes in fertility?
- How long will my treatment last?
- Where do I need to go to be treated?
- If I go to the hospital, how long do I have to stay there?
- How will I feel after treatment? How long will I feel this way?
- Will I be able to go to school and do my usual activities?
- How will this treatment affect me as an adult?

After treatment:

- When can I go back to school?
- What should I tell my teachers and classmates about my cancer?
- When can I return to my regular activities?
- What happens once treatment is over? Do I need more checkups? Will the cancer treatment affect me when I'm older?
- What are signs that the cancer is coming back?
- Whom should I call with questions?

Support and coping

- Are there other people my age with this type of cancer that I can talk to?
- How will the cancer affect my family and friends?
- Whom should I ask for additional support if I need it?
- Where do I turn if I have additional questions about coping with cancer?
- What changes should I expect in my body because of the cancer? Are any of these changes permanent? How can I cope with these changes?

More Information

Dealing with Cancer [4]

Taking Charge of Your Care [5]

Additional Resource

Group Loop: Visiting the Doctor [6]

Links
[1] http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/teens/questions-ask-doctor
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/29951
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/25138
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24669
[6] http://www.grouploop.org/mm/got-cancer/doctor/default.aspx