Talking With the Doctors and Nurses

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Discussing your questions, fears, and concerns with the doctors, nurses, and other members of the health care team is often difficult. Even so, it is important to feel comfortable talking with them so that you can receive the best possible care. Here are some tips to help you communicate effectively with them:

- Write questions [2] in a notebook before your appointment. This will help you remember what you would like to ask.
- Bring a record of your medical history so that you can focus on new information that the doctor gives you, rather than having to think about conditions or treatments that you have had in the past. You may find it helpful to use standard forms [3] to make sure that you write down all the information that you will need to provide to the doctor.
- Find out whether you can communicate with your doctor or nurse by email or phone if you have questions in between appointments.
- Ask for an explanation if you hear something that you don't understand.
- Ask about clinical trials [4] (research studies in people) for which you may be eligible. Ask early in the process because you may not be eligible for a clinical trial once you have started treatment.
- Let your doctors or nurses know if you have a preference about your care. For example, you may want to delay a round of chemotherapy so that you can attend a special event. Your doctor may tell you that a slight change in the treatment schedule will not be a problem, but you won't know if you don't ask.
- Ask as many questions as you need to make sure that you are comfortable with all of the information your doctor is sharing with you.
- Bring someone with you to your appointments to help you remember the information. Or ask if you tape the conversation.
- Tell your doctor if you wish to seek a second opinion [5]. Most doctors understand that a second opinion can help you make informed decisions about treatment options.

Communicating your feelings and needs

Doctors, nurses, and other members of your health care team are experts in treating cancer. They want to help you, but they are not mind readers. Nobody knows your physical and emotional needs better than you do. Here are some recommendations that may help you communicate what you are experiencing:

- Be clear about how you are feeling physically. Your health care team members need to know how your body is dealing with both the cancer and the treatment, so mention if you have pain or other problems, like diarrhea, even if it seems embarrassing. Often these side effects are treatable.
- Talk honestly about how you are feeling. Your health care team can also help you cope with the complex emotions [6] you may be feeling.
- If you are in the hospital, let the staff know your needs so that they can keep you as comfortable as possible.

More Information

Cancer in Young Adults: Things to Know [7]

Managing Your Care [8]

Cancer in Young Adults [9]

Additional Resources

LIVE**STRONG**: Communicate With Your Health Care Team [10]

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Newly+Diagnosed/Questions+to+Ask+the+Doctor
[3] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Newly+Diagnosed/Managing+Your+Care/Medical+Forms
[4] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Clinical+Trials
[5] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Publications+and+Resources/Find+an+Oncologist/Seeking+a+Second+Opinion
[6] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Emotional+and+Physical+Matters

[7] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Age-Specific+Information/Cancer+in+Young+Adults/Being+a+Young+Adult+With+Cancer/Things+to+Know
[8] http://www.cancer.net/patient/All+About+Cancer/Newly+Diagnosed/Managing+Your+Care
[9] http://www.cancer.net/patient/Coping/Age-Specific+Information/Cancer+in+Young+Adults
[10] http://www.livestrong.org/Get-Help/Learn-About-Cancer/Cancer-Support-Topics/Practical-Effects-of-Cancer/Communicate-With-Your-Health-Care-Team