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Seeking a Second Opinion [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 09/2015



[3] Listen to the [Cancer.Net Podcast: Seeking a Second Opinion](#) [3], adapted from this content

Cancer is often a confusing and frightening diagnosis. It may be hard to make decisions about treatment options. Because treatments are continually improving, it is important to find someone who has experience with your type of cancer. Many people seek the knowledge and advice of more than one doctor to confirm a diagnosis and evaluate treatment options. This is called a second opinion.

Asking for a second opinion is common practice. It may help you feel more comfortable with the health care decisions you make.

How a second opinion may help

A second opinion may provide the following information:

- Confirmation of a diagnosis

- Additional details about the type of cancer and its stage, such as:
 - A description of where the cancer is located

- Whether the cancer has spread
- Whether it is affecting other parts of the body
- Perspective from [experts in different oncology disciplines](#) [4], such as medical oncology, radiation oncology, and surgical oncology.
- Other treatment options, in situations in which the doctor disagrees with the original diagnosis or the proposed treatment plan
- What [clinical trials](#) [5] are open to you. These are research studies involving people.

Paying for a second opinion

Most insurance providers pay for a second opinion when cancer is suspected or diagnosed. However, before making an appointment, ask your insurance provider about coverage. Ask if there is a requirement of selecting from a specific group of doctors. Some insurance providers even require a second opinion before they will pay for cancer treatment.

Finding a doctor for a second opinion

Let your doctor know if you wish to seek a second opinion. Most doctors understand the value of a second opinion, and they are not offended when patients seek one. They may even be able to recommend another doctor. Also consider searching ASCO's [oncologist database](#) [6], a list of ASCO members in the United States and abroad who have made their contact information public.

The following are other possible sources to find an oncologist:

- Local hospitals, medical clinics, or cancer centers
- Medical associations who offer searchable databases of doctors
 - The [American Board of Medical Specialties](#) [7]
 - The [American Medical Association](#) [8]

- The [American College of Surgeons](#) [9]
- Medicare.gov offers a searchable [database of doctors who accept Medicare](#) [10].
- Friends and family members
- [Cancer organizations and patient advocate groups](#) [11]

Once you locate a possible doctor for a second opinion, ask about the doctor's area of specialty and credentials, such as board certification, training, and experience.

Preparing for the appointment

Gather all of your relevant medical records—including test results, such as blood work or imaging tests—to bring to the appointment. Often, the doctor providing a second opinion will request the results of any tests or procedures you have already undergone. This eliminates repeat testing. It is also helpful to have the actual images from your most recent imaging tests. Typical testing images include, a computed tomography (CT) scan, and the pathology slides from the biopsy used to confirm your diagnosis. Cancer.Net has a variety of [medical forms](#) [12] you can download to help keep all your information organized.

Getting the information you need during the appointment

Here are some tips for the appointment:

- Take notes during the consultation. Writing down the information you learn allows you to review it later.
- Take another person to the appointment with you to help you remember the discussion with the doctor.
- Ask questions, including requests for clarification if the doctor says something that you don't understand. It is important to feel confident that you have the information you need to make the best treatment decision.

More Information

[Choosing a Doctor for Your Cancer Care](#) [13]

[Questions to Ask the Doctor](#) [14]

[Making Decisions About Cancer Treatment](#) [15]

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/cancer-basics/cancer-care-team/seeking-second-opinion>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22983>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24957>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24863>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/find-cancer-doctor>

[7] <http://www.certificationmatters.org/>

[8] <https://extapps.ama-assn.org/doctorfinder/recaptcha.jsp>

[9] <https://www.facs.org/search/find-a-surgeon>

[10]

<http://www.medicare.gov/find-a-doctor/%28S%282ntfdw55plyexb55e1cncr45%29%29/provider-search.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/coping-with-cancer/finding-support-and-information/general-cancer-groups>

[12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25064>

[13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24949>

[14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24958>

[15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24582>