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Seeking a Second Opinion [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 09/2013



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

Key Messages

- Many people seek a second opinion to confirm a cancer diagnosis, learn more about the cancer, and hear different opinions on the best treatment options.
- Most doctors understand the importance of a second opinion, and your current doctor may even be able to recommend another doctor.
- Make sure the doctor you are visiting for a second opinion has access to all your records from your original diagnosis.

Cancer is often a confusing and frightening diagnosis, and 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. Gathering more knowledge about your diagnosis and the available treatment options 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 (a description of where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body)
- Perspective from experts in different oncology disciplines, such as medical oncology, radiation oncology, and surgical oncology. Learn more about [types of oncologists](#) [4].
- Other treatment options, in situations in which the doctor disagrees with the original diagnosis or the proposed treatment plan

- The availability of [clinical trials](#) [5] (research studies involving people), especially if the doctor providing a second opinion is affiliated with a major cancer center. Find a National Cancer Center (NCI)-designated [cancer center or cooperative group](#) [6].

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, and ask if you are required to select 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](#) [7], 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, such as the [American Board of Medical Specialties](#) [8], the [American Medical Association](#) [9], and the [American College of Surgeons](#) [10], which offer searchable databases of doctors
- 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, eliminating repeat testing. In addition to the test results, it is also helpful to have the actual images from your most recent imaging tests, such as 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

During the consultation, you may wish to write down the information you learn so that you can review it later, or take another person to the appointment to help you remember the discussion with the doctor. And don't be afraid to 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 an Oncologist \[13\]](#)

[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/sites/cancer.net/files/Seeking_a_Second_Opinion.mp3

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25356>

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

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/publications-and-resources/support-and-resource-links/general-cancer-organizations-and-resources/cancer-centers-coop-groups>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/newly-diagnosed/find-oncologist/find-oncologist-database>

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

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

[10] http://web2.facs.org/acmdir/default_public.cfm

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/publications-and-resources/support-and-resource-links/general-cancer-organizations-and-resources/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>