

Questions to Ask Your Doctor When You Find Out You Have Cancer

Learning that you have cancer can be a shock, and you may feel overwhelmed at first. When you meet with your doctor, you will hear a lot of information. These questions may help you to find out more about your cancer and what to expect going forward.

Questions about the cancer

- What type of cancer do I have?
- Can you explain my test results to me? Will I need more tests before my treatment begins?
- What is the stage of my cancer? Has my cancer spread to other areas of my body?
- What is my chance of recovery?
- How will cancer and its treatment affect my body?

Questions about finding a specialist and getting a second opinion

- How do I decide where to go for treatment?
- Will I need a specialist(s) for my cancer treatment?
- Will you help me find a doctor to give me another opinion on the best treatment plan for me?

Questions about clinical trials

- Would a clinical trial (research study) be right for me?

- How do I find out about studies for my type and stage of cancer?

Questions about lifestyle, finances, and resources

- How will my daily activities, such as work or school, change?
- How can I get help if I feel anxious or upset about having cancer? If I need help coping with family responsibilities?
- What costs will my insurance cover? Who can answer my questions about how to pay for treatment?
- How can I get help with financial and legal issues (for example, getting financial assistance, preparing a will or an advanced directive)?
- How can I get help with my spiritual needs?
- Can you suggest a support group that might help me?

Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Treatment

You may want to ask your doctor some of the following questions before you decide on your cancer treatment.

Questions about cancer treatment

- What are the ways to treat my type and stage of cancer?
- What are the benefits and risks of each of these treatments?
- What treatment do you recommend? Why do you think it is best for me?
- When will I need to start treatment?

- Will I need to be in the hospital for treatment? If so, for how long?
- What is my chance of recovery with this treatment?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?

Questions about finding a specialist and getting a second opinion

- Will I need a specialist(s) for my cancer treatment?
- Will you help me find a doctor to give me another opinion on the best treatment plan for me?

Questions about clinical trials

- Would a clinical trial (research study) be right for me?
- How do I find out about studies for my type and stage of cancer?

Questions about surgery

- Is surgery an option for me? If so, what kind of surgery do you suggest?
- How long will I stay in the hospital?
- If I have pain, how will it be controlled?

Questions about other types of treatment (such as radiation therapy or chemotherapy)

- Where will I go for treatment?
- How is the treatment given?
- How long will each treatment session take?

- How many treatment sessions will I have?
- Should a family member or friend come with me to my treatment sessions?

Questions about side effects from cancer treatment

- What about side effects from cancer treatment?
- What side effects may happen during or between my treatment sessions?
- Are there any side effects that I should call you about right away?
- Are there any lasting effects of the treatment?
- How can I prevent or treat side effects?

Questions about medicines and other products you might be taking

- Do I need to tell you about the medicines I am taking now?
- Should I tell you about dietary supplements (such as vitamins, minerals, herbs, or fish oil) that I am taking?
- Could any drugs or supplements change the way that cancer treatment works?

Questions to Ask Your Doctor When You Have Finished Treatment

When you have finished your cancer treatment, you will talk with your doctor about next steps and follow-up care.

You may want to ask your doctor some of the following questions:

- How long will it take for me to get better and feel more like myself?
- What kind of care should I expect after my treatment?
- What long-term health issues can I expect as a result of my cancer and its treatment?
- What is the chance that my cancer will return?
- What symptoms should I tell you about?
- What can I do to be as healthy as possible?
- Which doctor(s) should I see for my follow-up care? How often?
- What tests do I need after treatment is over? How often will I have the tests?
- What records do I need to keep about my treatment?
- Can you suggest a support group that might help me?

Questions to Ask Your Doctor About Advanced Cancer

Advanced cancer is cancer that has spread to other places in the body and usually cannot be cured or controlled with treatment. If you learn you have advanced cancer, you may have choices to make about care and next steps. When you meet with your doctor, consider asking some of the following questions.

General questions when cancer is advanced or recurs (comes back)

- What does “advanced cancer” mean for me?
- How long can I live with advanced cancer?
- Are there tests I should have now to better understand the extent of my cancer?
- What are my treatment choices? Which do you recommend for me? Why?
- What happens if I decide not to have treatment for my cancer?
- Can you suggest a support group that might help me?

Questions about clinical trials

- Would a clinical trial (research study) be right for me?
- How do I find out about studies for my type and stage of cancer?

Questions about symptom management and palliative care

- How can I manage the symptoms of my advanced cancer or the side effects of its treatment?
- Can you refer me to a palliative care specialist to help me cope with my cancer and its treatment?

Questions about moving from cancer treatment to hospice care

- How do I decide whether to continue or stop cancer treatment?
- When should I consider having hospice care?
- How can I make sure I have the best quality of life possible - that I am free of pain and comfortable?
- Can I have hospice care in my home, or do I have to go to a special facility?
- How can I get help with financial and legal issues (for example, paying for hospice care, preparing a will or an advanced directive)?
- How can I get help with my spiritual needs?