Talking With Your Doctor

Here are 10 questions to ask your doctor following a cancer diagnosis.

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Decisions about cancer treatment are rarely straightforward, but being direct with your doctor or nurse can make things easier.

Before suggesting a course of treatment, your doctor will consider the details of your individual case, the expected outcomes and the potential benefits and risks.

But your health care providers also need to understand what's important to you. For some people, the priority is simply to live as long as possible. Others put more emphasis on living well, with fewer symptoms or less pain. For some, being able to continue working or living independently are the primary concerns. Talking about your personal priorities will help your doctor or nurse provide better care.

When a treatment is suggested, ask questions to find out what it will involve. Basic information should include how long the treatment will last, how many hospital visits it will require, side effects, possible outcomes, how much it will cost and how it will affect your daily life.

Some of this information may be complex and confusing. Your doctor may use medical terms that don't make sense to you. If this happens, ask for the information to be explained in another way. If English is not your first language, a medical interpreter might be helpful.

Planning for your medical appointments can help you get the most out of them. Prepare a list of questions before you get there. When you arrive, tell your doctor or nurse the most important things you want to discuss that day.

It's easy to forget what you are told, so take notes during your appointment. Or ask if you can record the conversation on your phone. Having a friend or family member at the appointment is great for support—and he or she can also help you remember and interpret what the doctor said.

In many cases, a decision does not have to be made right away. If you are feeling overwhelmed, worried or upset, it can be difficult to take in new information and make decisions. You may simply need some extra time.

Top 10 Questions to Ask Your Doctor

1. What is this test for?
2. When will I have the results of the test?
3. What are the aims of this treatment?
4. Are there any alternatives to this treatment?
5. What will happen if I don’t get any treatment?
6. What short-term and long-term side effects might I have?
7. Can anything be done to reduce side effects?
8. Given my insurance status, how much will treatment cost me?
9. Is there anything I can do to speed up my recovery?
10. Can you recommend websites or reading material?

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