Cancer Treatment

Talking With Your Doctor

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 likely prognosis or expected outcomes and the potential benefits and risks of the treatment.

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 is the primary concern. Talking about your personal priorities will help your cancer care team provide better care and propose treatments that can help you meet your goals.

When a treatment is suggested, ask questions about what it will involve and what it will mean for your life. Find out how long treatment will last, whether it will require many hospital visits, its side effects and how likely they are to occur and how it will affect your daily life. Also ask how much treatment and related care will cost, given your insurance status.

In addition, ask about the range of outcomes that are possible with a specific treatment—the best outcome you can hope for, the worst outcome and the outcome that is most likely. Find out what other treatment options are available so you can compare the potential benefits and harms. In many cases, treatment doesn't have to start right away, so you can take some time to make a decision.

Information about treatment may be complex and confusing. Health care providers may use medical terms or statistics you don't understand. If this happens, ask for things to be explained in another way. If English is not your first language, a medical interpreter might be helpful.

Prepare a list of questions before a medical appointment. You can take notes during your appointment or record the conversation on your phone to help you remember the details. Having a friend or family member at the appointment can help you remember and interpret what the doctor said, as well as provide support.

10 Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What is this test for?
- What are the aims of this treatment?

- Are there any alternatives to this treatment?
- What are the likely outcomes of the treatment?
- What will happen if I don’t get any treatment?
- How long will the treatment last?
- What side effects might I have from this treatment?
- What can be done to reduce side effects?
- What can do to speed up my recovery?
- How much will the treatment cost?

For more information on discussing your care, visit:

American Cancer Society

National Cancer Institute

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http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/basics/health-basics/talking-doctor