



Talking With Your Doctor

Your health care team

You will have a team of trained people helping you deal with cancer. Each of these people has special skills that you might need. They can tell you where you can learn more about cancer. They can answer your questions, support you, and refer you to sources of help near you.

Being able to talk with your health care team is vital when dealing with cancer. Doctors and nurses can tell you a lot. You can ask them about:

- Your type of cancer
- Treatment options
- Side effects
- What you can and should do during treatment

You need to feel at ease with the “players” on your health care team. It takes time, care, and effort to build a strong team, but it’s worth it. These are the people who are working with you to fight cancer.

Your doctor

Your doctor is a key “player” on your team. It may take a little time and work before you feel at ease with him or her. Take the time to ask your questions and share your concerns. Your doctor must also take the time to listen to you and answer your questions.

Everyone has their own way of sharing information. That’s why the best doctor for one person may not be a good match for someone else. Think about what you want in a doctor. Some people want a doctor who shares facts in an expert and business-like manner. They don’t expect their doctor to be their friend. Other people want their doctor to have a great “bedside manner.” They want a doctor they can feel close to. Try to figure out what you need, and let your doctor know.

Your relationship with your doctor is important. Problems may come up, but talking about these problems with your doctor can help. Clearly state your concerns and wishes. Give examples. If you’re not happy with this relationship, you may need to think about other options, such as switching doctors. If this happens, tell your doctor about your decision and the reasons for it. Ask for their help in turning over your care to the new doctor.

Ask yourself, “How much do I want to know?”

It’s OK to learn at your own pace. Only you know when you are ready to talk, when you want to learn more about your cancer, and how much detail you want.

You may want to know a lot about your illness. Some people feel more in control of what’s going on when they know all the facts. Or you may want only small amounts of information. It upsets some people to be told too much at one time. They may feel stressed or overwhelmed by details. Some of these people might prefer to leave most decisions to their doctor. Tell your doctor how much or how little you want to know.

Asking questions

Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Many doctors wait for you to ask questions, but you may not even know what to ask. It’s easy to forget the questions you or your loved ones may have. It helps to write them down as they come up, then take them with you when you go to the doctor’s office. Here are some common questions people have about cancer:

- What kind of cancer do I have?
- What treatment do you suggest?
- Are there other treatments?
- How will these treatments help me?
- How might they hurt me? What are the risks?
- What medicines will I get? What are they for?
- How will I feel during treatment?
- What side effects, if any, should I watch for?
- Are there any side effects or unusual signs that I need to tell you about right away?
- What can be done about the side effects?
- What’s the best time to call if I have a question or problem? How quickly can I expect to be called back?
- What should I do if I have a serious problem when your office is closed?
- Should I get a second opinion? From whom?

How can I remember everything?

It’s hard to remember all of the things you are told at each doctor’s visit. It helps to have the same person there with you each time. They can remind you of questions you want to ask and help you recall what the doctor said.

It may also be easier to have this person talk to your loved ones about how you are doing. This will help them know what's going on, but keep you from having to deal with a lot of questions. You might want your loved ones' help in making decisions, so keeping them up to date is a good idea.

Be sure you or your loved one writes down what your doctor tells you. You may even want to record your talk. Be sure to ask your doctor if it's OK first.

If you need more details after your doctor answers a question, say so. It may be helpful to ask the same question again in some other way. Sometimes, doctors use words that are hard to understand. If you don't understand something, ask your doctor to explain it. It may help to ask for pictures, websites, videos, or other things you can take home and look at.

When you get instructions from your doctor, write them down. Make sure you understand them before you leave the office. Then follow them exactly. It's OK to call the doctor's office if you have more questions later. Nurses can often help you, too.

Above all, your doctor should take your questions seriously. They should want to know about your concerns and not make you feel rushed. If your doctor does not respond this way, let them know.

Make sure all your doctors talk with each other.

You will often have more than one doctor, and each one should know what's being done. Make a list of all your doctors' names, specialties, phone numbers, and addresses. Give a copy of this list to each doctor who's on it. This will make it easier for them to talk with each other and share reports and medical records.

You may have to sign forms saying it's OK for them to share information and talk about your case. This is done to protect your privacy. When you visit a doctor, ask if they have talked with your other doctors or gotten their reports.

It's your health care team.

You are a key member of your health care team. Your team will count on you to be an active partner. This means going to office visits, taking medicines as prescribed, telling your doctor or nurse about any problems or concerns you're having, and asking questions.

Taking an active role in your care will help you learn what you need to know. It will also help make sure that everyone is working with you to fight the cancer. For some, it takes time to learn how to be an active team member. You may be surprised at how good you and your loved ones will get at this over time.

You may never know as much about cancer and its treatment as your doctor, but you and your loved ones are the only ones who can decide what's best for you. As part of your team, keep in mind that you have a key part to play in your care.

If you need to learn more about how to be an active member of your health care team or have questions about your cancer or cancer treatment, please call us anytime, day or night, at **1-800-227-2345**.

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1-800-227-2345 or www.cancer.org