

Questions for your Doctor/Health Care Provider Team When Facing Cancer

At every stage of your journey through cancer, you will receive detailed information about your condition, treatment options, possible side effects and other important considerations. And you'll be asked to make decisions about your care based upon that information.

To help you make the best and most informed choices, we have prepared a sample list of questions for you to ask your physician or other members of your health care team. You may have other questions that are not included here.

BEFORE BIOPSY

What kind of biopsy will I have? Why?

Where will the procedure take place? Will I have to go to the hospital?

Will I have to prepare for the biopsy in advance; for example, will I need an enema or to stop taking aspirin beforehand to reduce the chance of bleeding?

How long will it take? Will it hurt?

Will I be awake or will I need anesthesia? If so, what kind?

What are the risks?

What are the chances of infection or bleeding after the procedure?

Will I be given an antibiotic or other medication afterward?

How long will it take me to recover?

Will I have a scar?

How soon will I know the results?

If I do have cancer, who will talk to me about the next steps? When?

BEFORE TREATMENT

What is the stage of the disease?

Has the cancer spread? If so, to where?

What is the goal of treatment?

What are my treatment choices?

Which do you recommend for me? Why?

Will I have more than one kind of treatment?

What are the expected benefits of each kind of treatment?

What are the risks and possible side effects of each treatment?

What can we do to control or reduce side effects? Will they go away after treatment ends?

What can I do to prepare for treatment?

What can I do to take care of myself during treatment?

Will I need to stay in the hospital? If so, for how long?

What is my chance of a full recovery?

What is the treatment likely to cost? Is this treatment covered by my insurance plan?

How will treatment affect my normal activities? For instance, am I likely to have urinary problems, or problems with diarrhea or rectal bleeding? Will treatment affect my sex life?

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

Can you recommend other doctors who could give me a second opinion about my treatment options?

How often should I have checkups after treatment?

BEFORE SURGERY

There are many surgical options for cancer patients today, including minimally invasive approaches that reduce pain, the risk of infection and blood loss, and recovery time. Find out what's right for you by asking your doctor:

What kind of operation do you recommend for me? Why?

What is the goal of surgery?

Do I need any lymph nodes removed? Will other tissues be removed? Why?

What are the risks of surgery?

Will I have any lasting or long-term side effects? For example, what is the chance that surgery will cause incontinence, impotence, fertility or otherwise affect my sex life?

How will I feel after the operation?

If I have pain, how will it be controlled?

How long will I be in the hospital?

When can I get back to my normal activities?

Is there someone that I can talk with who has had the same surgery that I'll be having?

How often will I need checkups?

BEFORE RADIATION THERAPY

Why do I need this treatment? What is the goal of this treatment?

Which type of radiation therapy can I consider? Are both types (external and internal, if available) an option for me? Which would you recommend?

When will treatment start? When will it end? How often will I have treatments?

How will I feel during treatment? Will I be able to drive myself to and from treatment sessions?

Will I need to stay in the hospital?

What can I do to take care of myself before, during and after treatment?

Can I continue my normal activities during treatment?

How will we know the treatment is working?

What are the side effects? Will radiation therapy harm my skin? Affect my sex life? Will I be able to get pregnant after my treatment is over?

What is the chance the cancer will come back?

Are there any lasting effects?

How often will I need checkups?

BEFORE CHEMOTHERAPY

Systemic therapies are delivered through the blood stream to attack any cancer cells they may find, anywhere in the body. While chemotherapy – the use of strong, anti-cancer drugs – is probably the most familiar form of systemic therapies, more targeted forms of treatments are increasingly available including hormonal and biologic (also called monoclonal) therapies. If your doctor recommends any of the above, here are some good questions to ask before starting treatment:

Why do I need this treatment?

If you have endometrial cancer, what were the results of the hormone reception test?

What drug or drugs (or hormones) will I have? What will they do?

How do the drugs work?

What are the expected benefits of the treatment?

What are the risks and possible side effects of treatment? What can we do to prevent or reduce side effects?

When will treatment start? When will it end? How often will I have treatments?

Where will I go for treatment? Will I be able to drive home afterward?

What can I do to take care of myself during treatment?

How will we know the treatment is working?

Which side effects should I tell you about?

Will there be long-term effects?

How will treatment affect my normal activities?

How much will it cost? Will my health insurance pay for all of the treatment?
