

Questions to ask your doctor



When cancer is diagnosed you enter into a partnership with your doctor and other health care professionals. To help you get the best care in this partnership you have the right to:

- Ask questions.
- Be specifically informed about the details of your care.
- Make an informed choice on treatment from the options available to you.

It is important to ask questions, especially if you are unsure or unclear and feel you need more information. Encourage your family to do the same. Seek as much information as you feel you need. It is up to you how involved you want to be in making decisions about your treatment. This may change over time, so remember to keep your doctor informed about your preferences.

Your own treatment

To help get the most out of your visit to your doctor, you might consider:

- Requesting a longer appointment if you have a number of issues to discuss.
- Preparing your questions beforehand.
- Taking a friend or relative for support, or to write down answers to your questions if possible.
- Asking your doctor to explain again, if you don't understand the answers.
- Asking your doctor to give you a written summary of your treatment plan.
- Asking for an interpreter if you have difficulty communicating in English (contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50).

General questions

- What is the name of my cancer or condition?
- Is it slow or fast growing?
- Which part or parts of my body are affected?
- Is it possible to cure or control my cancer?

Questions about tests

- What will this test involve?
- What information will you get?
- What are the benefits and risks to me in having this test?
- Will the results of this test make any difference to the decision on what type of treatment I have?

Questions about treatment

- What is the aim of each treatment? Is it to cure, control, prevent spread, prevent recurrence or relieve symptoms?
- What difference will this treatment make to my quality of life – can I work, have sex?
- What are the possible side-effects of treatment? Can these side-effects be prevented or controlled? Are the effects temporary or permanent?
- What if this treatment does not work?
- Are there any complementary therapies that I can have?
- I would like a couple of weeks to make a decision. Will that make any difference?
- Who are the members of my treatment team?

If advanced cancer is diagnosed

- What treatments are available to relieve my symptoms?
- Who will be responsible for my medical care?
- What help can my family and/or friends get if they care for me at home?
- How can I access palliative care?

Participating in clinical trials (research studies)

During the course of your treatment you may be asked if you would like to take part in a clinical trial. Questions to ask include:

- Are there any clinical trials suitable for me?
- What would I have to do as part of the clinical trial?
- What are the possible side-effects?
- What are the benefits and risks for me?
- Do I have the right to refuse?
- Can I withdraw from the clinical trial at anytime?
- Are these studies important for me or others?

Where can I get reliable information?

Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

Contact the Helpline for:

- Information including free written material on specific cancers.
- Information on Cancer Council support services, which may include counselling, financial assistance and accommodation for country people.
- Information on chemotherapy, surgery and radiation therapy.
- Someone confidential and professional to talk to about what you are going through.

Cancer Council Australia website

(with links to state and territory Cancer Councils)

www.cancer.org.au