



Talking With Your Doctor and Cancer Care Team

Good communication is important when you are part of a team. How well you are able to talk with your cancer care team is a key part of getting the care that's best for you.

You will have a team of trained people helping you deal with your cancer. This team will include doctors and other health care professionals such as nurse practitioners (NPs), physician assistants (PAs), pharmacists, social workers, clinic or chemotherapy nurses, technicians, medical assistants, dietitians, and patient navigators. They each have their own role, and if you ask a question they can't answer, they'll know who can help.

How much do I want to know?

Some people might want to know a lot about their cancer because they feel more in control of what's going on when they know all the facts. They might want to know lots of information and details about their care.

Other people might not want to be told too much at one time and may feel stressed or overwhelmed by details. Some people might prefer to leave most decisions to their doctor. Tell your cancer care team what works best for you.

Ask questions

It is important to remember that the type of care and treatment you get is up to you. Learning about your cancer and how it can be treated can help you make these decisions with your doctor.

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 what you want to ask about, so write questions down as you think of them and take them with you when you go to appointments.

Here are some common questions people have about cancer:

- What kind of cancer do I have?
- How big is my cancer? Where is it? Has it spread to other parts of my body?
- Will I need a biopsy or other tests?
- What treatment do you suggest?
- Who would give me this treatment?
- Are there other treatments that might help me?
- What medicines will I get? What are they for?
- What are the risks and side effects of each treatment?
- How will I feel during treatment?
- 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?

Your cancer care team should take your questions seriously. They should want to know about your concerns and not make you feel rushed. If they do not respond this way, let them know.

Tips for remembering what the cancer care team tells you

It's hard to remember everything you are told at each visit. It helps if you can bring the same person with you each time. They can remind you of questions you want to ask and help you remember what was said.

Be sure you or the person with you writes down what you learn at your appointments. If you would like, ask your doctor or other team member if it's OK to record your talk.

If you need more details, say so. Sometimes, cancer care team members use words that are hard to understand. If you don't understand something, ask them to explain it. It may help to ask for pictures, printed materials, website or video links, or other things you can look at when you get home.

When you get instructions, 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.

Find the right fit

Your relationship with your doctor is important, and everyone has their own way of communicating and

sharing information. That's why the best doctor for one person may not be a good fit for someone else. Some people want a doctor who shares facts in an expert and businesslike way. They don't expect the doctor to be their friend. Other people want a doctor they can feel close to. Try to figure out what you need, and let your doctor know.

If communication problems come up, talk to your doctor about them. Be honest about your concerns and wishes. If you're not happy with your relationship, it's OK to change doctors. Tell your doctor about your decision and the reasons for it. Ask for their help in moving your care to the new doctor.

It's YOUR cancer care team

You are an important part of your cancer 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 team about any problems or concerns you're having, answering their questions, asking your own questions, and helping them make decisions about your care.

You and your loved ones are the only ones who can help decide what's best for you. It might take time to learn how to be an active team member, but you may be surprised at how good you and your loved ones will get at it.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at **cancer.org**. We're here when you need us.



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