

Questions to Ask Your Oncologist about Your Disease

The more accurate information you have about your disease, the more you will be empowered to make decisions about your cancer treatment. There are many questions you can ask the cancer specialist, and different questions may come up at different times depending on the stage of your disease and the treatments you are undergoing. Open and honest communication is important between you and your medical team. However, it is also important to remember that your physician may not have the answers to all of your questions. There is a lot about cancer, and living with the disease, that we still just don't know. Listed below is a list of questions patients should be asking of their treatment team.

Some general questions to ask your cancer specialist

- What kind of cancer do I have?
- How far advanced is my cancer?
 - What are the cell type, grade, and stage of my cancer?
 - What does that mean in my case?
- Should I get a second opinion?
- What are my treatment options?
 - What treatment options are there? What do you recommend for me? Why?
 - How many different treatments options are there? How do you decide which one is best for me?
 - What cutting-edge therapies are available?
 - What complementary and alternative treatments would be potentially beneficial for me?
 - What is the goal of this treatment?
 - What are the risks or side effects that I should expect? What can be done about these?
 - Will I be able to have children after my treatment?
 - What are the chances my cancer will come back with the treatment we have discussed?
 - What should I do to be ready for treatment?
 - Should I follow a special diet?
 - What are my chances of survival, based on my cancer as you see it?
- Will I have to stay in the hospital for treatment?
 - If so, how long?
- Will treatment keep me from doing the things I enjoy?
- How frequently will I need to be seen after my treatment?
- When can I resume regular daily activities after treatment?
- What has been your experience with cancer patients with similar disease?
- Can you recommend any patient support groups in my area?
- What additional resources are there for me to learn about my cancer?

Questions to ask about chemotherapy:

- What specific type of chemotherapy is right for me?
- Can chemotherapy ease my symptoms?
- What can I do to cope with side effects?
- Should I consider chemotherapy as a preventive treatment?
- How long will my chemotherapy treatments last?
- Will I be able to return to my normal activities after chemotherapy?
- What experiences have other patients had with similar chemotherapy regimens?

Questions to ask about surgery

- Am I a good candidate for surgery?
- How soon will I be able to return to normal activities after surgery?
- What are the chances that surgery will remove all of my cancer?
- Should I consider undergoing chemotherapy or radiation after surgery to make sure all the cancer is destroyed?
- What exercises can I do after surgery to get stronger?
- How do your other surgery patients feel about the procedure?

Questions to ask about clinical trials

- What are the possible risks and benefits?
- What are possible side effects of the treatment?
- How long will the trial last?
- Will I have to travel to another hospital, city, or state?
- Will my insurance cover the costs?
- Can I have family members with me when I receive treatment?
- Will I have to change doctors during the trial?

Talk with your doctor about the possibility of gaining access to clinical trials related to your disease. It is important to remember that while clinical trials can be helpful, there is no guarantee that investigational treatments will be beneficial.

Your physician should be asking the patient the following types of questions

- What are your expectations for your cancer therapy?
- What are your goals for therapy?
- How aggressive do you want your treatment to be?
- How open are you to unproven therapies? To what extent?
- How do you feel about participating in clinical trials? If there was potential benefit for you? If there was no potential benefit for you but potential for benefiting others in the future?
- Whom can I speak with about you and your care if I am unable to speak directly with you?
- How much information do you want about your health care and how much detail do you prefer?