

Questions to ask your doctor

If you have been diagnosed with cancer, learning more about the disease and its treatment helps you have an active role in your care. Asking your doctor questions will also help you make informed choices. You may want to use these questions as a guide and include some in your own list.

Questions you may want to ask

Diagnosis

- What type of cancer do I have?
- Has the cancer spread? If so, where has it spread? How fast is it growing?
- What's the stage of the cancer? What does the stage mean for my treatment?
- Are the latest tests and treatments for this type of cancer available in this hospital?
- Will a multidisciplinary team be involved in my diagnosis and treatment?
- Are there clinical guidelines and an optimal care pathway for this type of cancer?

Tests

- What will this test involve?
- What are the benefits and risks of having this test?
- What will the test results tell us? How will the results affect the type of treatment I'm offered?

Treatment

- What treatment do you recommend? What is the aim of the treatment?
- Are there other treatments that might work? If not, why not?
- How long will treatment take?
- Who will provide the treatment?
- Will I have to stay in hospital?
- Are there any out-of-pocket expenses not covered by Medicare or my private health cover? Is there a way the cost can be reduced if I can't afford it?
- Will I have only one treatment or will I also have other treatments?
- How long do I have to make a decision?
- I'm thinking of getting a second opinion. Can you recommend anyone?
- If I don't have the treatment, what should I expect?
- How will I know if the treatment is working?
- What if this treatment does not work?

Side effects

- What are the risks and possible side effects of each treatment? How can these be managed?
- Will the side effects improve or have lasting effects?
- Is there any side effect that I should particularly look out for?
- Are there any complementary therapies that might help me?
- Can I have the flu, COVID-19 or other vaccines?

Clinical trials

- What does taking part in a clinical trial mean?
- Are there any clinical trials or research studies I could join?

After treatment

- How often will I need to have check-ups after treatment finishes?
- Who should I go to for the check-up appointments?
- If the cancer returns, how will I know? What treatments could I have?

If advanced cancer is diagnosed

- What's the best I can hope for by having treatment?
- Are there new treatments I can try? Is the treatment going to improve my chance of getting better?
- What treatments can 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?
- Can I have palliative care? How do I get it?
- Can you help me talk to my family about what is happening?

These are general questions only. You can find more questions about a specific tumour or treatment in the relevant booklet or on cancercouncil.com.au.

How to talk with your doctor

To make the most of your appointments with your doctor before, during and after treatment, you could:



Book a longer appointment
request a longer appointment if you have a number of issues to discuss



Make a list of questions
write down your questions before the appointment



Take a support person
bring a friend or family member for support, or to write down information



Record the conversation
ask your doctor if you can record the conversation



Get more information
ask where to find more information about tests and treatments



Ask for an interpreter
use an interpreter if you speak a language other than English

Where can I get more information?

- **Call Cancer Council 13 11 20.** Our experienced health professionals can listen to your concerns, put you in touch with local services, and send you our free booklets. You can also visit our website at cancercouncil.com.au.
- **Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS).** If you need information in a language other than English, call 13 14 50 and ask to be connected with 13 11 20.

Other questions to ask

This question checklist was developed with help from a range of health professionals and people affected by cancer.

Note to reader Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This fact sheet is intended as a general introduction and is not a

substitute for professional medical, legal or financial advice. Information about cancer is constantly being updated and revised by the medical and research communities. While all care is taken to ensure accuracy at the time of publication, Cancer Council NSW excludes all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this fact sheet.



Cancer Council NSW acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.

