



Questions to ask your health care team when you have been diagnosed with cancer

Receiving a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming, confusing, and disorienting. To help you gather important information about your cancer care and treatment, feel free to use this list of suggested questions during your appointments with your health care team, and do not hesitate to ask any additional questions you may have. Take the time to talk regularly with your health care team to make informed decisions about your care. Remember that you are a crucial member of your health care team.

Questions about treatment and managing side effects:

- What are my treatment options based on my diagnosis? What is the standard of care for this type of cancer?
- What is the timeframe to begin treatment? What can I incorporate into my daily routine to maintain a stable health condition until my treatment begins?
- What clinical trials are available to me? Where are they taking place, and how do I learn more about them?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to kill cancer cells, help me feel better, or both?
- What are the short-term and long-term risks and possible side effects of each treatment?
- Which medical professionals will be involved in my treatment and care? (i.e. oncologist, gastroenterologist, surgeon, radiologist, ostomy nurse, genetic counselor)
- Who in my health care team will be leading my overall treatment?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to exercise? Will I be able to work? Are there public/private resources available to help me?
- Will this treatment impact my sex life? If so, how and for how long?
- Could this treatment impact my ability to have children? If so, should I speak to a fertility specialist before I begin treatment?
- Will I have to pay out of pocket for any treatment or services?
- What kind of support services (financial, psychosocial, etc.) are available to me? to my caregiver?
- Who can I talk to if I have questions or doubts about my treatment?
- Will I have a pivot nurse or nurse navigator? What will their role be during this process?



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Questions to ask before surgery:

- What kinds of tests will be done before I receive surgery?
- Where exactly is the cancer located?
- If I have rectal cancer, do I need to have radiation or chemotherapy before surgery?
- Can you describe the surgery I will be receiving?
- What will be removed during the surgery? part of the colon/rectum, lymph nodes?
- Will a tissue biopsy be done? Is it part of the surgery?
- After the surgery, how long will it take to receive all my test results back and a firm diagnosis?
- Will I need an ostomy? If so, will it be temporary or permanent?
- How many times have you performed this surgery successfully?
- Is this the standard of care for the type of cancer I have?
- How long will I have to stay in the hospital?
- How do I prepare for my surgery?
- After the surgery, how will I be able to control any pain I may feel?
- What are the possible side effects associated with this type of surgery?

Questions to ask after surgery:

- Based on my surgery and biopsy, what is my formal diagnosis?
- Can you explain my pathology report and laboratory test results?
- Was my tumour tested for a possible genetic cause? Do I need to undergo genetic testing? Are any of my relatives at a higher risk of developing colorectal cancer?
- What is my prognosis?
- What additional treatments do you recommend and why? Will they affect my prognosis?
- Are the treatments standard of care or part of a clinical trial?
- How long will it take for me to be able to return to work after surgery?
- If I need a colostomy, who can I talk to about how to manage it?
- If I experience any side effects, who should I contact and when?



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Questions to ask about radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or targeted therapies:

- What is the goal of this treatment?
- How long is this treatment given?
- Has my tumour been tested for biomarkers? If so, which ones? What impact do they have on my treatment?
- What side effects are possible with this treatment?
- If I experience any side effects, who should I contact and when?
- Are there any possible long-term side effects of this treatment?
- What can I do to manage my side effects?
- Will tests be conducted during treatment to ensure the treatment is working? If so, what are they and how often?

Questions to ask about follow-up care:

- Is it possible that the cancer will come back? Are there specific signs or symptoms I should be aware of?
- Are there any long-term side effects that I could experience based on the treatment(s) I received?
- What follow-up tests do I need to do, and how often?
- Who is responsible for leading my follow-up care?
- What survivorship support services are available to me and those who are close to me?

Questions adapted from Cancer.Net
<https://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/colorectal-cancer/questions-ask-health-care-team>