

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR DOCTOR

Communicating With Your Doctor

Regular communication with your doctor is important. Whether you are dealing with a suspicion, diagnosis or coping with the side effects of treatment, it is important to know what questions to ask your doctor so as to best equip yourself in the prevention, management and treatment of the disease. The more information you have about colorectal cancer, the easier it will be to make informed decisions.

Colorectal Cancer Canada has designed a comprehensive list of questions for patients to ask their treating physician according to their specific circumstances.

Colorectal Cancer Screening

- Based on my family and medical history, do I have any of the risk factors that would make me more likely to develop colorectal cancer?
- Are my children or other relatives at higher risk for colorectal cancer?
- If I have any of the risk factors, are there any changes I can make to place me at a lower risk?
- What are the signs and symptoms that I should be aware of?
- Should I be screened for colorectal cancer?
- If so, what screening test(s) do you recommend for me?
- How do I prepare for these tests? Do I need to change my diet or my usual medication schedule?
- What is involved in the test? Will it be uncomfortable or painful? Is there any risk involved?
- When and from whom will I obtain my results?
- If I am to have a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy, who will do the exam?
- Will I require someone with me on the day of the exam?
- How often will I need a colonoscopy?

Suspicion Of Colorectal Cancer

- What other medical conditions might be causing my symptoms?
- What are the common risk factors for colorectal cancer?
- Am I at increased risk for the disease? Why or why not?
- What types of examinations and diagnostic tests are performed to diagnose cancer of the colon or rectum?
- What do these tests involve?
- How should I prepare for these colorectal cancer tests? What are the specific instructions?
- Will I be able to drive myself home after my test(s) or will I require someone to drive me?

- Will I require any special assistance at home after undergoing these diagnostic procedures?
- Should I call for my test results or will someone contact me? What number do I call and on which day?

Diagnosis

- What type of colorectal cancer do I have?
- What stage is my cancer?
- What is my prognosis?
- What doctors do you recommend?
- Where exactly is the cancer located?
- Are you able to tell me if my cancer has spread beyond my colon?
- Are there other tests that need to be done before we can decide on treatment?
- Are you able to tell me how quickly the cancer is likely to grow?
- Will it make a difference if I were to change my diet?
- Does my diagnosis mean that my blood relatives are at higher risk for colorectal cancer? Should they talk to their doctors about screening?
- What are my treatment options based on my diagnosis?
- What treatment option do you recommend? Why?
- What other doctors will I be required to see for the treatment of my disease? Should I see a surgeon? Medical oncologist? Radiation oncologist? Should these doctors be involved in planning my treatment before we begin?

Specialists

- How do I contact the members of my health care team?
- Am I a candidate for surgical removal of the colorectal tumour? If so, what type of surgical procedure do you recommend and when?
- Should I obtain a second medical opinion before beginning cancer treatment? Why or why not?

Obtaining A Second Opinion

Some patients may find it difficult to tell their doctors that they would like to seek out a second opinion, however many cancer patients explore multiple options. As well, most doctors are comfortable with the request. Patients must be advocates for their own healthcare. If you are uncertain as to how to begin, the following list of suggested questions may aid in addressing the subject with your doctor:

- Before we start treatment, I would like to get a second opinion. Will you assist me with that?
- I think I would like to speak to another doctor to be sure that I have all my bases covered.
- I'm thinking of seeking out a second opinion. Can you recommend someone? If so, who would you recommend and why?

Checklist Of Important Documents

At some point, even if you do not change doctors before or during treatment, you may find yourself in the office of a new doctor involved in the treatment or management of your disease. It is important that you be able to give your new doctor the exact details of your diagnosis and treatment. The

following checklist will aid in the sharing of your information with the new doctor and it is recommended that you always keep copies for yourself:

- A copy of the pathology report from any biopsy or surgery**
- If you have had surgery, a copy of the surgical report**
- If you have been admitted to the hospital, a copy of the discharge summary that every doctor must prepare when patients are sent home**
- If you have had radiation therapy, a final summary of the dose and field**
- Since some drugs can have long-term side effects, a list of all your drugs, dose amounts and when you took them (including over-the-counter drugs)**