

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

A guide for people affected by cancer

Finding out you have cancer can feel overwhelming. This fact sheet suggests some questions you may want to ask your cancer care team.

Questions to ask your doctor

Ask as many questions as you need. Getting answers to your questions helps you make informed decisions.

Your diagnosis

- What cancer do I have?
- Has the cancer spread? If so, where has it spread? How fast is it growing?
- What stage is the cancer? What does this mean?
- What are the latest tests and treatments for this type of cancer? Where can I get these?
- Which medical professionals will I see?
- Is there a cancer support group for people who speak my language?

Having tests

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

About treatment

- Can you describe my treatment plan? What is the aim of the treatment?
- Will I be able to work during treatment?
- What happens if this treatment does not work?
- How long will I have treatment?
- Where will I have treatment?
- How will I know if the treatment is working? When might I know?

- How much will treatment cost? Is it covered by Medicare or private health cover?
- What is the difference between public and private cancer treatment?
- Can I get a second opinion?
- What happens if this treatment does not work?

Possible side effects

- What are the possible side effects of each treatment? How can these be managed?
- How long will side effects last?
- Will the side effects improve or be lasting?
- Who can I talk to during the treatment if I have side effects?
- What are the side effects I should tell my treatment team about straightaway?
- Are there any medicines I can take to prevent or lessen side effects?
- Are there any complementary therapies that might help me?

After treatment finishes

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

If advanced cancer is diagnosed

- What is the aim of treatment for advanced cancer?
- Are there new treatments I can try? Will they improve my chance of getting better?
- What treatments or care can I have to relieve my symptoms?
- What help can my family and friends get if they care for me at home?
- Can you help me talk to my family about what is happening?

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 several issues to discuss.



Make a list of questions

Write down your questions before the appointment.



Take a support person

Bring a family member or friend 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

See if your doctor can arrange an interpreter.

Joining a clinical trial

Your medical team may suggest you take part in a clinical trial. Clinical trials test new or modified treatments and ways of diagnosing disease. Questions to ask about clinical trials include:

- What does taking part in a clinical trial mean?
- Are there any clinical trials suitable for me?
- What would I have to do as part of the clinical trial?
- What are the benefits and risks for me?
- Do I have the right to refuse to join a clinical trial?
- Can I withdraw from the clinical trial at any time?
- Are these studies important for me or others?

Where to get help and information in your language



- **Call Cancer Council 13 11 20.** We can connect you with interpreter services and provide resources in your language.
- **Call TIS National on 131 450.** This is a free interpreting service that can connect you with an interpreter you can use for your medical appointments or to contact Cancer Council.

- **How to find this resource in English and other languages.**
Visit our multilingual hub at cancercouncil.com.au/multilingual or scan this QR code.



SCAN ME

Acknowledgements

The fact sheet has been developed by Cancer Council NSW using information from the Cancer Council Australia *Understanding Cancer* series as source material. We would like to thank the health professionals and consumers who have worked on this information.

See our [website](#) for the list of expert and consumer reviewers for this fact sheet.

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 Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided in this fact sheet.

This translation is funded through the generosity of the people of NSW. To support Cancer Council, call 1300 780 113 or visit cancercouncil.com.au.



Cancer Council NSW acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia 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 and present.

