



Canadian
Cancer
Society

Questions to Ask When You Have Cancer



1 888 939-3333 | [cancer.ca](https://www.cancer.ca)

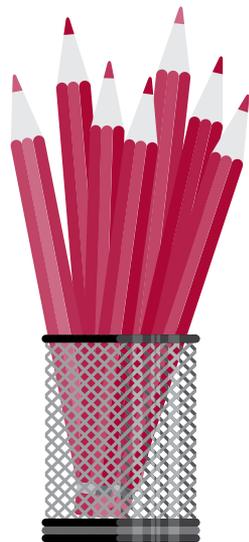


Introduction

Many people who are treated for cancer say that it's easy to feel overwhelmed by all the information you're given and the decisions you need to make.

This booklet can help. The team of healthcare professionals who plan and monitor your treatment will tell you a lot of information – test results, treatment cycles, side effects you need to report. Use this booklet to write down these details.

We also suggest some questions to ask your healthcare team. You don't have to ask all of them or even any of them. But you may find that asking questions helps you make decisions that are right for you.



When you're diagnosed

Diagnosis is the process of finding the cause of a health problem. In most cases, cancer is confirmed by having some type of biopsy.

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The type of cancer I have is _____

It can also be called _____

Other tests I need that will tell us more about the cancer

Name of test _____

When and where _____

How to prepare (for example, not eating or drinking)

Name of test _____

When and where _____

How to prepare (for example, not eating or drinking)

How long does it take to get the results of the test(s)?

Who will explain the test results to me? Should I have a family member or friend with me?

Where can I get a copy of my test results?

About the cancer

Important information about the cancer, such as type, stage, grade, location and spread, helps your healthcare team plan your treatment. Your healthcare team will also consider your age and overall health in their planning.

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Stage describes the size of the tumour and whether it has spread.

The **size** of the tumour is _____

The **stage** is _____

**Were lymph nodes removed yet? Did any of them show cancer?
What does this mean?**

Has the cancer spread anywhere else?

Grade describes how the cancer cells look and behave compared with normal cells. The **grade** is _____

How fast is the cancer growing?

What is the outlook, or prognosis, for this type of cancer? What factors will be important for me?

Your treatment plan

Your healthcare team will recommend a treatment plan just for you. Even someone with the same type of cancer may have a treatment plan that is different from yours.

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My recommended treatment plan is _____

The goal of my treatment plan is _____

I will have treatments in this order _____

How will we know if the treatments are working?

Do I need to decide on my treatment right away? How much time can I take before I need to talk to you about my decision?

What might happen if I don't have treatment?

What are clinical trials? Would I be able to join a clinical trial for my type of cancer?

Will I need to use birth control during treatment? What type should I use?

Will treatment affect my ability to have children in the future?

Surgery

Surgery, or an operation, is a medical procedure to remove or repair tissue. It is the main treatment for many types of cancer. You will have follow-up care to monitor how you're doing after surgery and to help decide if you need more treatment.

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The surgery I will have is called _____

When and where _____

How to prepare (for example, not eating or drinking)

Why do you recommend this surgery?

Will you remove any lymph nodes? If so, why?

Are there any side effects that I need to report right away? Who do I tell?

**Am I likely to have side effects that will affect my daily life? For how long?
What can be done about them?**

Are there long-term effects from the surgery?

Radiation therapy

Radiation therapy uses high-energy rays or particles, such as x-rays or gamma rays, to damage or destroy cancer cells. Radiation therapy may be given from outside the body as external beam radiation. It may also be given internally as brachytherapy or systemic radiation therapy.

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The type of radiation therapy I will have is _____

The schedule will be _____

How to prepare (for example, not eating or drinking)

Why do you recommend this treatment?

How will we know if the treatment is working?

How will it be combined with other treatment, if at all?

Are there any side effects that I need to report right away? Who do I tell?

Am I likely to have side effects that will affect my daily life? For how long? What can be done about them?

What are the possible long-term effects from the radiation therapy?

Chemotherapy and other drug therapies

Treating cancer with drugs used to just mean chemotherapy. Now it's about much more. Chemotherapy, hormonal drug therapy and targeted therapy all use drugs in different ways to destroy cancer cells, stop them from spreading or slow down their growth.

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The **drugs** I will be given to treat my cancer are

Name of drug _____

Name of drug _____

Name of drug _____

Name of drug _____

The cycle will be _____

How to prepare (for example, not eating or drinking)

Why do you recommend this treatment?

How will we know if the treatment is working?

How will it be combined with other treatment, if at all?

Are there any side effects that I need to report right away? Who do I tell?

Am I likely to have side effects that will affect my daily life? For how long? What can be done about them?

What are the possible long-term effects from the drug therapy?

Complementary therapies

A complementary therapy is a therapy used together with conventional cancer treatments (surgery, radiation therapy, drug therapies). A complementary therapy – such as meditation or massage – doesn't treat the cancer itself but may help you cope emotionally and physically with cancer or side effects from treatment.

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I'm interested in _____
as a complementary therapy.

Are there any complementary therapies offered at my cancer centre?

Is there a complementary therapy that might help with _____?

**Do you know of any risks or benefits to using this complementary therapy?
Could you help me track them?**

**When would it be safe for me to use this complementary therapy with my
conventional cancer treatment?**

Can you give me a referral to a qualified practitioner of this therapy?

**Can someone on my healthcare team help me make sure I'm not having any
side effects from the complementary therapy?**

Cancer and your emotions

Where can I find help to talk about my feelings if I need it?

How can I manage feelings of stress, anger or sadness?

How do I talk to my friends and family about cancer and my treatment?

What can my partner and I do to help each other?

How can I talk about the changes in my body with my partner?

Do I have to tell a new partner that I have or have had cancer? How can I start this conversation?

What can I do about the changes to my interest in sex?

The treatment has made me feel self-conscious about _____.
How do I start feeling normal again?

Helping your family cope with your cancer

How do I tell my family about my cancer diagnosis?

Is there emotional support or counselling available for my family?

Is there any practical support (for example, rides to treatment, financial help, places to stay) that can help us?

How do I get support for my children at school?

Can the person who is caring for me at home get a break from caring for me? Should we get on a list for respite care or for a hospice?

Do my family members have a greater risk of getting cancer? What should I tell them about their risk? Do they need genetic testing?

What can my family members do to reduce their risk of developing cancer?

What can my family members do to make sure that a possible cancer will be detected early?

Finances, work and planning

A good motto in this area is “plan for the worst, but hope for the best.” Living with cancer can be a costly experience, especially if you need to give up work for a while. And all adults – even young, healthy ones – should plan for the type of healthcare they would like to have if they were ever not able to make their own decisions. It’s important for everyone to think about and talk over with their loved ones.

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Will I have to pay anything for my treatments or rehabilitation? Am I covered by any insurance programs?

Will I be able to work during and after treatment? Will I have to change my job?

Are there any financial assistance programs to help me with some of the expenses I have? Who can help me find these programs?

Can I apply for long-term disability benefits?

If I can no longer care for myself or if I can’t make my own healthcare decisions, what do I need to consider? Who should I talk to?

Who can help me with my will?

What's my new normal?

Will I need to learn to do anything differently after treatment? Who can help or teach me what I need to know?

Will I need any special equipment or will I need to make changes at home?

Will I still need to take any medicines? If so, for how long?

Will I need to eat different foods or eat on a different schedule?

Will my energy levels get back to what they used to be?

Will I need to change any of my work activities or duties? If so, how?

Has treatment affected my ability to get pregnant? Has treatment affected my ability to father a child? How long should I wait before I try?

Follow-up care

Follow-up care helps you and your healthcare team monitor your progress and your recovery from treatment. At first, it may be managed by one of the specialists from your team. Later on, it may be managed by your family doctor. The schedule of visits is different for each person.

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How often should I have follow-up visits? How long should these continue?

Who will I see for my follow-up visits?

What will happen at a follow-up visit?

What tests are done on a regular basis? How often are they done?

Are there any symptoms that I should report right away? Who do I call?

Who can help me cope with long-term side effects of treatment?

Health and wellness after cancer

Learning what you can do to live a healthy life after cancer can be a positive step forward. Your wellness plan can be tailored to your needs, preferences, overall health and fitness level. It's OK to start small! What's important is that you understand your plan and can start to follow it as soon as your healthcare team says you are well enough.

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Are there changes I can make to my lifestyle to reduce my risk of cancer coming back?

How active do I need to be? What type of physical activity might be good for me?

Do I need to make any changes to my diet? Who can help me with these changes? Are there certain foods that I should or shouldn't eat?

Who can help me in my goal to quit smoking? How do I contact a smokers' helpline where I live?

Do I need to be more careful than the average person about sun and UV exposure? What should I do?

Canadian Cancer Society

We're here for you.

When you have questions about treatment, diagnosis, care or services, we will help you find answers.

Call our toll-free number **1 888 939-3333**.



Ask a trained cancer information specialist your questions about cancer.

Call us or email info@cis.cancer.ca.



Connect with people online to join discussions, get support and help others.

Visit CancerConnection.ca.



Browse Canada's most trusted online source of information on all types of cancer.

Visit cancer.ca.

Our services are free and confidential. Many are available in other languages through interpreters.

Tell us what you think

Email cancerinfo@cancer.ca and tell us how we can make this publication better.



What we do

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

Contact us for up-to-date information about cancer and our services or to make a donation.



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