

Questions to ask your Oncologist

Understanding your options

Diagnosis with cancer can be confronting and upsetting. It can become confusing and overwhelming when speaking to a number of doctors. It helps to write down a list of questions you wish to ask your oncologist. The questions listed here may help you to understand your condition and the treatments you are being offered. Answers will provide an overview of important information and actions to help ensure you are receiving the care that is best for you and will help you stay up to date with key information regarding your care.

Shared decision making

It can be helpful to have a family member or friend attend appointments with you to provide support, ask questions, take notes and potentially record the session. You may also wish to seek a second (or third) opinion if it will make you feel more comfortable about your decisions.

- What is my diagnosis?
- What are the likely outcomes of this diagnosis and what is my chance of recovery?

Optimal care

- Do you specialise in treating my type of cancer?
- Has this treatment been successful for my diagnosis?
- What are the outcomes or complications you have faced with my type of cancer?
- Is there anything unique about my cancer that makes my prognosis better or worse?
- Is there another specialist who treats this type of cancer that you recommend for a second opinion?

Care plan

- Will a written plan of care be provided?
- Will this plan include:
 - The frequency of treatments and tests
 - Side effects I should expect and how to manage them
 - Disruptions to expect to my work, family or other responsibilities
 - Resources I can use to understand my diagnosis and treatment better
 - How and when to contact my care team if I have questions or concerns
 - How my caregivers will be involved and my preferences for how I would like to be treated
- Will a member of my care team provide a clear explanation of my care plan so that I can understand it?

Holistic care

- Will someone need to drive me to treatment(s)?
- Is help available if transportation is an issue?
- Do you have any information around diet, exercise or other health recommendations?
- How will any medication I am currently taking interact with my treatment?
- Will you schedule all my necessary appointments and provide a copy for my reference?

Questions to ask your Oncologist

Emotional and mental health

- Is there support or counselling available for emotional or psychological concerns I may have? (including anxiety, depression, or other worries)
- Do I require a referral to speak with a counsellor?

Treatment options

- Is it necessary to have treatment right now?
- What are all my treatment options?
- What are the pros and cons of each treatment option?
- What is the goal of this treatment?
- How will I know if my treatment is working?
- What are the side effects of my treatment?
- How can I prepare for the side effects of my treatment or prevent them?
- Are there any alternative treatment options available to me?
- How will treatment affect my daily activities?
- How will treatment affect my quality of life?
- What can I expect if I decide not to have treatment?
- How much time do I have to think about this? Do you need my decision today?
- What is your opinion about the best treatment for me?

Treatment plan

- What exactly will be done during the treatment and how will it affect me?
- What is the treatment schedule, e.g. how many treatments, how often, and for how long?
- Where will I have the treatment?
- Are there any advantages/disadvantages of the private versus public health system?

Preparing for treatment

- Is there anything that I can do before or after my treatment that might make it more effective, e.g. diet, work, exercise, etc.?
- What are the do's and don'ts while having treatment?
- What problems should I look out for and who do I contact if they occur?
- What is my long-term follow up plan?

Clinical trials

- What are clinical trials?
- Are there any clinical trials that I may be suitable for?
- What are the pros and cons of clinical trials?
- What is involved if I enroll in a trial (extra appointments, questionnaires)?

Questions to ask your Oncologist

Costs

- What costs will I incur throughout my treatment, e.g. medication, chemotherapy, etc.?
- Am I eligible for any benefits if I cannot work?
- Can I change from public hospital treatment to private hospital?
- Can I change from private hospital treatment to public hospital – can you arrange this? Will I need another referral?

Multidisciplinary team

- What is a multidisciplinary team?
- Do you work as a part of a multidisciplinary team?
- Can you explain the advantages of a team approach?
- How do you all communicate with each other and me?
- Who will oversee my care?
- What do I do if I get conflicting information?

We're here to help

For more information about questions for your doctor or medical team, contact our Specialist Support Team on 1300 881 698 or email support@pancare.org.au.

Questions for my doctor about advanced stage cancer

Finding out that you have advanced cancer, or a recurrence of your disease can feel overwhelming. The questions listed here may help you to understand your condition and the treatments you are being offered.

- What is palliative care?
- Do I need a referral to access palliative care?
- What other treatment options are available to me?
- When is a good time to stop treatment?
- How can I effectively plan my end of life care?
- What support is available to me and my family for managing advanced stage cancer?
- Are there any other professionals or specialists who I should be referred to?
- Do I need a referral into palliative care?