

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN DEALING WITH CANCER AND CANCER TREATMENTS

I. QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR WHEN S/HE ORDERS TESTS:

1. What is the test for?
2. What will the procedure be like?
3. What will you learn from the test?
4. Why is it important for me to have this test?
5. Will I need to be hospitalized for the test?
6. Can it be done on an outpatient basis instead?
7. How much will the test cost?
8. What are the risks in doing the test?
9. When will we get the results?
10. What decisions will I have to make if the test is positive?

II. QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE DECISIONS ARE MADE ABOUT TREATMENT:

1. Is this the doctor I want to handle my case?
2. Am I comfortable with him/her?
3. Is s/he someone who understands how I feel and is sensitive to my needs?
4. Do I have enough information to make a decision?
5. Who do I want with me when I get a diagnosis?
6. Should I have a second opinion?
7. Should I go to another facility for further tests or treatment?
8. Which hospital do I want to go to for treatment?

III. QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT TREATMENT:

1. What treatments are available?
2. What treatment do you recommend?
3. Is this treatment necessary for me?
4. Are there other alternatives? What are they?
5. Why do you think this treatment is preferable?
6. What do you expect the results to be?
7. How safe is the procedure?
8. What are the side effects of the treatment and what can be done to relieve them?
9. Can I be put on a treatment program that won't interfere with my work?
10. How will we determine how well the treatment is working?
11. When can I call you to ask further questions?
12. Do I have a type of cancer which would be better treated at a specialized center?

IV. QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR SURGEON BEFORE AN OPERATION:

1. Why do you want to do the surgery?
2. Exactly what will you do—in simple terms?
3. How long will I be in the hospital?
4. What are the chances of a cure with surgery?
5. What other treatments can you use instead of surgery?
6. Are there any less extensive, less deforming, less painful operations than the one you are suggesting?
7. What are the risks of surgery?
8. What are the risks of the other possible treatments?
9. What is the risk of death or serious disability?
10. Do you feel the benefits outweigh the risks? Why?
11. What are the possible consequences of postponing the operation?

12. What will happen if I don't have the operation?
13. How much will it cost?
14. How long will my recovery take?
15. How disfiguring will the operation be?
16. How disabling will it be? How long will this last?
17. Will I have to have drains, catheters, intravenous lines, transfusions?
18. What are the possible aftereffects?
19. Whom do you suggest I see for a second opinion?
20. Can this be done on an outpatient basis?

V. QUESTIONS TO ASK THE ANESTHESIOLOGIST:

1. What medication will I be given before going into the operating room?
2. Who will give me the medication and the anesthesia?
3. How will they be given to me?
4. Will my allergies be a problem?
5. What type of anesthetic will you give me?
6. What are the side effects?
7. What are the risks?
8. How long will the operation take?
9. How long will it be before I wake up?
10. Will I go to a recovery room after the operation?
11. What are your fees?
12. Is a general anesthetic necessary for this operation?

VI. QUESTIONS TO ASK HOSPITAL STAFF:

1. What is scheduled to happen to me?
2. Who can I best get information from when there are delays or when I don't understand what is going on?
3. What is the purpose of this test? What will it determine?
4. What is this drug for? When medication is changed or different from what you usually take, ask staff to check and make sure it is prescribed by your doctor for you.
5. Do I have to stay in bed?
6. Can I walk around the ward or leave it and go to other public areas of the hospital?
7. What are usual visiting hours and procedures?

VII. QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE LEAVING THE HOSPITAL:

1. How long will I have to take it easy?
2. Will I need to stay in bed at home? For how long?
3. Will I need help at home?
4. Will I be able to care for myself?
5. When can I resume normal activities? Drive a car? Have sex? Play sports?
6. Will I have to follow a special diet or regimen?
7. What symptoms should I keep track of and report to you?
8. What symptoms should I ignore?
9. When can I go back to work?
10. What medications should I continue to take?
11. What exercise should I regularly get?

VIII. QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT RADIATION THERAPY:

1. What type of radiation treatment will I get?
2. Who will be responsible for my radiation treatment?
3. Who should I talk with when I have questions about the treatment?

4. Can I work during the time I am receiving treatment?
5. Is there a more convenient place where I can get these treatments?
6. How long will each treatment take? How many sessions will there be?
7. What side effects can I expect?
8. What should I do if these side effects occur?
9. How much will this cost?
10. How much risk is involved?
11. What are my alternatives?
12. What is likely to happen if I don't have these treatments?

IX. QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT CHEMOTHERAPY:

1. Who will be giving me these treatments?
2. What are the names of the drugs to be used?
3. What are these drugs supposed to do?
4. What are the possible side effects? What should I do if these occur?
5. Which side effects should I report to the doctor immediately?
6. How will the drugs be given to me?
7. How often will the treatments be given?
8. How long will each treatment take?
9. How long will the whole series last?
10. Can I take other medications at the same time? Can I drink alcohol?
11. Is there any special nutritional advice I should follow?
12. Are there any special precautions I need to take while on chemotherapy?
13. How much will it cost?
14. What are the risks involved?
15. What are my alternatives? What will likely happen if I don't have this treatment?

X. QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE AGREEING TO INVESTIGATIONAL OR EXPERIMENTAL TREATMENT PROCEDURE:

1. What exactly does the experimental treatment involve?
2. Have I signed a consent form?
3. Has the doctor explained the procedures to be followed?
4. Has the doctor explained the purpose of the procedure?
5. What are the risks involved?
6. Will the treatment make me sicker?
7. What are the benefits of this new treatment?
8. What are my alternatives?

XI. QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE USING UNPROVEN TREATMENTS:

1. Why am I considering use of this kind of treatment?
2. What do I hope the treatment will accomplish?
3. Am I placing myself in some jeopardy by using this treatment?
4. Have I discussed these treatments with my doctor?
5. Will my doctor continue to care for me if s/he knows about my use of these treatments?
6. Is there a way my doctor and I can come to some sort of compromise over this matter?
7. Can I continue my regular treatments and the unproven treatments at the same time?
8. Is there an experimental treatment that would give the same results as I hope to achieve?
9. What will the cost be in terms of my time, energy, emotions and money?
10. How much is my motivation to take these treatments based on my fears and wants to avoid looking at what is happening to me?
11. Are there other approved treatments that I could try instead of my regular treatments?

12. Am I doing this to please family or friends or to keep peace in the house?

XII. QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR SOCIAL WORKER OR THERAPIST:

1. How do I share my diagnosis of cancer with my family? Should I protect them from knowing what is going on?
2. What resources exist in this community for people with my disease? For financial help? For information about my illness? For legal help? For counseling help?
3. What can I do about all of these feelings and mood changes I am experiencing? Is it normal to feel these things? Angry? Sad? Scared? Over-burdened? Picked on?
4. How can I deal with the things that are happening to my body? The way I look? My lack of energy? How I feel about myself?
5. Will I lose my interest in romance and sex? How can I handle it if s/he is turned off because of my illness?
6. What is wrong with me? Some of my friends seem scared or distant since I've gotten cancer. How can I talk with them about this? How do I bring the subject up?
7. How can I get myself and my family to look at and plan for the possibility of death? What can I do if they deny it or are uncomfortable when I bring the subject up?
8. How do I develop the quality of life I want right now and still take care of my responsibilities to family and friends?
9. Why do I sometimes feel guilty about having cancer? Is it normal to think sometimes that I'm being punished by God for past sins? Or that I caused myself to have cancer?
10. I sometimes feel crazy and/or angry with my family and friends. Is this normal? What can I do about this?
11. How can I relax and let my body do its job of curing me when there are so many stressful things happening to me?
12. How can I get my spouse or lover to talk with me about what is happening and how s/he feels about my illness? How do I handle their being angry at me for being sick?
13. What are some of the psychological gains or payoffs I might be getting from having cancer? How do I sometimes use having cancer as a way to manipulate others into doing or giving me what I want? What is the cost to me and my relationships when I do this?
14. What can I do when I feel angry or upset with my doctor or other medical staff?
15. What can I do if I feel I'm being treated unfairly by the hospital, insurance company, or my therapist?
16. How can I deal with friends who try to persuade me to look into different cancer cures, diets, religions or therapies?