Questions to Ask My Doctor About Prostate Cancer

Being told you have prostate cancer can be scary and stressful. You probably have a lot of questions and concerns. Learning about the disease, how it's treated, and how this information may apply to you is a lot to do on your own. You might need some help. Your American Cancer Society can give you general information about this disease and its treatment, but your doctor is the best source of information about your situation.

It's important for you to be able to talk frankly and openly with your cancer care team. They want to answer all of your questions, no matter how minor they might seem to you. But it helps if you know what to ask. Here are some questions you can use to help you better understand prostate cancer and your options. Don't be afraid to take notes and tell the doctors or nurses when you don't understand what they're saying.

These questions are grouped by where you are in the process of cancer treatment. Not all of the questions will apply to you, but they should help get you started.

For information on prostate cancer please contact your American Cancer Society toll free at 1-800-227-2345 or online at www.cancer.org.

When you're told you have prostate cancer

1. Exactly what type of prostate cancer do I have?

2. How do I get a copy of my pathology report?

3. What's my PSA (prostate-specific antigen) level? What does this mean?

4. What's the cancer's clinical stage and grade (Gleason score)? What does this mean?

5. Has the cancer has spread beyond my prostate?

6. How does this affect my treatment options and long-term outcome (prognosis)?

7. What are my chances of survival, based on my cancer as you see it?

8. How much experience do you have treating this type of cancer?

9. Will I need other tests before we can decide on a treatment?

10. What are my treatment choices?

11. What treatment do you recommend and why?

12. What’s the goal of my treatment?

13. Is watchful waiting (active surveillance) an option for me? Why or why not?

14. Do I need to have my prostate removed or treated with radiation? Why or why not?

15. If I have surgery (a radical prostatectomy), will the nerve bundles be spared? Will the surgery be laparoscopic or robot-assisted?

16. If I have radiation, what types of radiation therapy might work best for me, external beam or implanted seeds (brachytherapy), or both?

17. What are the pros and cons of radiation versus surgery in my case?

18. What other treatment(s) might be right for me?

19. Should I get a second opinion? How do I do that?

20. Should I think about taking part in a clinical trial?

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Prostate Cancer

When deciding on a treatment plan

1. What are the chances the cancer will come back after this treatment?

2. What would we do if the treatment doesn’t work or if the cancer comes back?

3. Will I be able to have children after treatment?

4. How much will I have to pay for treatment? Will my insurance cover any of it?

5. How long will treatment last? What will it involve?

6. Where will treatment be done?

7. What risks and side effects should I expect?

8. What can I do to reduce the side effects of the treatment?

9. How will treatment affect my daily activities?

10. Will I be able to work during treatment?

11. What are the chances that I will have problems controlling my urine (incontinence) or problems getting an erection (impotence)?

12. What are the chances that I will have other urinary, sexual, or bowel problems?

13. Will the treatment hurt? Will I have any scars?

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Prostate Cancer

Before treatment

1. What should I do to get ready for treatment?

2. Will I need blood transfusions?

3. Should I change what I eat or make other lifestyle changes?

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Prostate Cancer

During treatment

Once you have decided on treatment, you'll need to know what to expect and what to look for. All of these questions may not apply to you, but asking the ones that do may be helpful.

1. How will we know if the treatment is working?

2. Is there anything I can do to help manage side effects?

3. What symptoms or side effects should I tell you about right away?

4. How can I reach you on nights, holidays, or weekends?

5. Do I need to change what I eat during treatment?

6. Are there any limits on what I can do?

7. What kind of exercise should I do, and how often?

8. Can you suggest a mental health professional I can see if I start to feel overwhelmed, depressed, or distressed?

9. Will I need special tests, such as imaging scans or blood tests, and how often?

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Prostate Cancer

After treatment

1. Do I need a special diet after treatment?

2. Are there any limits on what I can do?

3. What can I do about impotence/incontinence and other side effects? Will I recover normal function? What can I do in the meantime?

4. What kind of exercise should I do now?

5. What type of follow-up care will I need after treatment?

6. How often will I need to have follow-up exams and imaging tests?

7. What blood tests will I need?

8. What should my PSA level be after treatment? How long will it take it to get there? What was my last PSA result?

9. How often will my PSA be checked? How long will I have to get PSA tests?

- My PSA level is still detectable. Does this mean there’s still cancer in my body?

- My PSA level is higher than the last time it was checked. Does this mean the cancer has come back?

10. How will I know if the cancer has come back? What should I watch for?

11. What are my options if the cancer comes back?

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Prostate Cancer

Other questions I need answered

Along with the sample questions you've been given, be sure to ask any others you might have. For instance, you might need to know more about how long it will take to recover from surgery so you can plan your work schedule. Or, you may need to ask about insurance coverage or how you can get help paying for treatment. Write your own questions here.

Last Medical Review: 4/17/2013
Last Revised: 4/17/2013

2013 Copyright American Cancer Society

For additional assistance please contact your American Cancer Society
1 · 800 · ACS·2345 or www.cancer.org