Questions to Ask My Doctor About Skin Cancer (Basal and Squamous Cell)

Being told you have skin 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 basal or squamous cell skin 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.

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

For information on basal and squamous cell skin cancers 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 skin cancer

1. Exactly what type of skin cancer do I have? Can you explain the different types of skin cancer to me?

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

3. Has the cancer spread under my skin? How thick is it?

4. Has it spread to lymph nodes or other parts of my body?

5. What is the cancer's stage? What does that mean?

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. Will I be OK if the cancer is just removed and I don't have more treatment?

12. What treatment do you recommend and why?

13. What's the goal of my treatment?

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

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

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Skin Cancer (Basal and Squamous Cell)

When deciding on a treatment plan

1. What are the chances my 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. Will I lose my hair? If so, what can I do about it?

12. Will the treatment hurt?

13. Will I have a scar? What will it look like?

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Skin Cancer (Basal and Squamous Cell)

Before treatment

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

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

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Skin Cancer (Basal and Squamous Cell)

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 Skin Cancer (Basal and Squamous Cell)

After treatment

1. Do I need a special diet after treatment?

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

3. What kind of exercise should I do now?

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

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

6. What blood tests will I need?

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

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

9. What are my chances of developing another skin cancer? What can I do to lower my risk?

10. Should I take special precautions when I'm in the sun?

11. What are the most important steps I can take to protect myself from ultraviolet light?

12. Are my family members at risk for this type of skin cancer? What should I tell them to do?

13. Should I tell my children's doctors that I have been diagnosed with skin cancer?

Questions to Ask My Doctor About Skin Cancer (Basal and Squamous Cell)

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