



Talking With Your Doctor

Good communication is important to being part of a team. How well you are able to talk with members of your health care team is a key part of getting the care that's best for you.

Your doctor

Your doctor is a key “player” on your team. It may take a little time and work before you feel at ease with him or her. Take the time to ask questions and share your concerns. Your doctor must also take the time to listen to you and answer your questions.

Everyone has their own way of sharing information. That's why the best doctor for one person may not be a good fit for someone else. Think about what you want in a doctor. Some people want a doctor who shares facts in an expert and business-like manner. They don't expect their doctor to be their friend. Other people want their doctor to have a great “bedside manner.” They want a doctor they can feel close to. Try to figure out what you need, and let your doctor know.

Your relationship with your doctor is important. Problems may come up, but talking about these problems with your doctor can help. Clearly state your concerns and wishes. Give examples. If you're not happy with this relationship, you may need to think about

switching doctors. Tell your doctor about your decision and the reasons for it. Ask for their help in turning over your care to the new doctor.

How much to know?

It's OK to learn at your own pace. Only you know when you are ready to talk, when you want to learn more about your cancer, and how much detail you want.

You might want to know a lot about your illness. Some people feel more in control of what's going on when they know all the facts. Some people don't want to be told too much at one time. They may feel stressed or overwhelmed by details. Some people might prefer to leave most decisions to their doctor. Tell your doctor how much or how little you want to know.

Asking questions

It's important to remember that the care and treatment you get is your decision to make. You need to learn enough about your cancer and how it can be treated so you can help your doctor decide what is best for you.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Many doctors wait for you to ask questions, but you may not even know what to ask. It's easy to forget what you wanted to ask about. It helps to write questions down as you think of them. Then take them with you when you go to the doctor's office.

Here are some common questions people have about cancer:

- What kind of cancer do I have?
- What treatment do you suggest?
- Are there other treatments that might help me?
- What are the risks?
- What medicines will I get? What are they for?
- How will I feel during treatment?
- What side effects, if any, should I watch for?
- Are there any side effects or unusual signs that I need to tell you about right away?
- What can be done about the side effects?
- What's the best time to call if I have a question or problem? How quickly can I expect to be called back?
- What should I do if I have a serious problem when your office is closed?
- Should I get a second opinion? From whom?

How can I remember everything?

It's hard to remember all of the things you are told at each doctor's visit. It helps to have the same person there with you each time. They can remind you of questions you want to ask and help you recall what the doctor said.

If you need to learn more about how to be an active member of your health care team or have questions about your cancer or cancer treatment, please call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



Be sure you or your loved one writes down what your doctor tells you. If you would like, ask your doctor if it's OK to record your talk.

If you need more details after your doctor answers a question, say so. Sometimes, doctors use words that are hard to understand. If you don't understand something, ask your doctor to explain it. It may help to ask for pictures, websites, videos, or other things you can take home and look at.

When you get instructions from your doctor, write them down. Make sure you understand them before you leave the office. Then follow them exactly. It's OK to call the doctor's office if you have more questions later. Nurses can often help you, too.

Above all, your doctor should take your questions seriously. They should want to know about your concerns and not make you feel rushed. If your doctor does not respond this way, let them know.

It's *your* health care team.

You are a key member of your health care team. Your team will count on you to be an active partner. This means going to office visits, taking medicines as prescribed, telling your doctor or nurse about any problems or concerns you're having, and asking questions.

You and your loved ones are the only ones who can decide what's best for you. It might take time to learn how to be an active team member, but you may be surprised at how good you and your loved ones will get at it.

