

## During Your Visit:

- Tell your doctor your story. Be as honest and as complete as possible.
- Help your oncologist know your hopes, concerns and goals. Discuss your quality of life.
- Listen carefully as your doctor presents your case to you. Many of your questions may be answered.
- Take notes or ask the person who comes with you to take notes.
- Use the list of questions you've prepared before your visit.

## After Your Visit:

- Review your visit with the person who came with you. Check how each of you understood what your doctor told you. Note any differences and follow up with your doctor.
- Keep a list of new questions that come to mind. Do this immediately after your visit and in the days and weeks ahead. It takes time to process all that you've heard.
- Consider keeping a journal to keep track of your symptoms, treatment side effects and other physical aspects your doctor has asked you to monitor. You may also journal mental, emotional and spiritual aspects – whatever is helpful for you.
- Don't depend on blogs or other non-reputable sources for explanations or advice. Check with your doctor for reliable resources, such as the American Cancer Society.
- Don't depend on the opinions of others as to whether you're getting the right care. Although well-intended, their advice is usually based on their own experiences and may not apply to you.

Sources: Memorial Sloan Kettering; Dana Farber Cancer Institute; American Cancer Society; HopeWell Cancer Support. A special thank you to Jean Fleming, EdD, for compiling and organizing these tips and resources.



## PREPARING to TALK with Your Oncologist

*Developed by Other Cancer Patients and Survivors*

As you begin to establish a relationship with your doctor, you want to make sure your time together is as valuable as possible. Everyone's cancer journey is unique, but sometimes advice from those who have gone through it can help.

### Basic Ground Rules:

- You have a right to know as much as you want to know. It's your body and your life.
- Be prepared for things to happen fairly quickly in the beginning.
- Understand the time constraints of physicians.
- Preparing for your visits helps you be a better patient.
- The best care is a result of a partnership with your oncologist (or any provider).
- Be prepared with questions and rank them according to priority for you. Ask someone you trust to help you identify what is important for you to know.
- Having your list of questions ready before your visit will help you get the answers you need.
- Be sure you completely understand your diagnosis, your prognosis, your options for treatment.
- Ask yourself: What are the three most important things I want from my doctor?
- Be sure you are comfortable with and believe in the care you are receiving.

## Preparing for Your Visit:

- ✓ Ask for forms and paperwork to be sent to you in advance.
- ✓ Be prepared for filling out all forms:
  - Write your medical history using a timeline of events. For example, state when symptoms started and what tests have been done (if any). List other specialists you've seen and other cancer diagnoses.
  - List your medications, including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, herbs and supplements.
  - Set up a system to keep track of treatments, procedures, tests.
- ✓ Be sure your oncologist has all the reports from any previous tests, scans, biopsies, etc.
- ✓ Learn how to use your patient portal.
- ✓ If at all possible, have someone come with you who can take notes, give emotional support and help you process things after your visit.
- ✓ Remember every cancer is different and acts differently, and every person is different. Depend on your partnership with your doctor to determine what is right for you.



## Examples of Questions to Ask During your Visit *(Prioritize according to your needs at the time):*

- What is my diagnosis?
- What tests, scans, biopsies need to be done before starting treatment?
- What is my prognosis? What are the expectations for my treatment?
- What is the goal? Is the expectation for a cure? For long-term remission? For slowing growth and prolonging life? Are we focusing on quality of life? Discuss palliative care and hospice as options. Find out about writing a will and an Advanced Directive/ MOLST.
- What are my treatment options? Pros & cons of each?
- What is the plan for my treatment? Schedules, durations, locations, times?
- How will my treatment affect my daily life? Will changes be temporary or permanent?
- Can I get a second opinion before I start treatment? Where and/or who would you recommend?
- What are the most common side effects of my treatment? When should I be concerned?
- What are the most important things for me to pay attention to? Symptoms? Side effects? How I feel overall?
- What happens if the treatment doesn't work – or stops working?
- What other resources are there that will help me?
- What can I do to help my treatment be successful?
- What is the best way to reach you if I experience any problems? Any new symptoms? How can I ask questions between visits?
- Can someone show me where to go for all appointments? For example, for infusion, radiation, surgeries, scans?
- What are the financial implications of my treatment?
- Ask: Is there a question I should be asking? Am I missing anything?

