

Making a Treatment Decision

Making a decision about cancer treatment can be an overwhelming experience for many people. Important decisions need to be made about treatment for new or recurrent cancer as well as ending treatment. Decisions are made throughout your cancer journey related to managing your disease and its impact on your life. Sometimes it is hard to know what questions to ask the doctor. One proven strategy for getting the most out of your appointment is to be as prepared as possible. Having a written list of questions can help you feel more organized and comfortable in asking the questions you need to have answered as you work together with your doctor to make a decision about which treatment is right for you.

As you consider the treatment options with your oncologist and your family, you will need to determine what you can realistically expect from treatment. Talk with your doctor to better understand your type and stage of cancer. You can also discuss what your doctor feels is the best goal of treatment for you and share your goals around cancer treatment. A goal of treatment may be cure, slowing or controlling tumor growth, or extending your life while maintaining quality of life. Some cancer treatments are designed to control pain and other symptoms when a cure is not possible. Surgery, chemotherapy and radiation can have difficult side effects, so it's important for you to weigh the benefits and the challenges, and make a decision that is best for you. Cancer treatments today have come a long way from years ago. There are many medications that reduce side effects and make it possible for you to continue to work or keep up with your usual activities.

Tips for Treatment Decision Making

- Ask your doctor if a decision needs to be made immediately or if you have some time to become more informed and weigh all your options.
- Try and learn as much as possible about your cancer and treatment options before making a decision. There are excellent booklets and online information available through the Cancer Support Community, the National Cancer Institute and many other organizations to help you get more informed.
- Consider getting a second opinion from another doctor or cancer center about your diagnosis and treatment options. Getting another opinion elsewhere does not mean that you must be treated at that center but it may help you to feel more confident about your choices.
- Consider asking your doctor if there is a clinical trial that is right for you. Clinical trials are often an excellent way to access the newest treatment options.
- Bring a family member or friend along to listen along with you, take notes and keep track of the options.
- Check with your insurance company and/or talk with a financial counselor at the cancer center or doctor's office about the financial aspects of your various treatment options.
- Talk about your decision with someone you trust. It can be helpful to talk through your ideas and concerns with family, friends, clergy or health professional. Some people find that support groups are a useful place to gather information and suggestions from others.