



CANCERcare®

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Fact sheet

# “Doctor, Can We Talk?”

## Tips for Communicating With Your Health Care Team

Talking to your doctor can be difficult. No matter what your diagnosis, hearing about it may leave you feeling frightened or overwhelmed. Good communication with your doctor will help improve the quality of the care you receive.

Here are some ways to improve communication with your health care team:

**Remember that you are the consumer.** As a patient, it is important to remember that you are a consumer of health care. The best way to begin making difficult decisions about health care is to educate yourself.



**Bring someone with you to your appointment.** It is always helpful to have support, and the person can serve as a second set of ears. He or she may also be able to think of questions to ask your doctor or remember details you may have forgotten.

**Prepare a list of questions beforehand.** This way, you won't forget to ask about something that was important to you. Make your questions specific and brief because your doctor has limited time. Once you're at your appointment, ask your most important questions first.

**Write down your doctor's answers.** Taking notes will help you remember your doctor's responses and instructions. It also allows you to go over the information later when you have more time to concentrate or do research.

**If possible, tape-record your visits.** Ask your doctor if you can record your conversation. Taping your visit gives you a chance to hear specific information again or share it with family members or friends.

### SAYING AND HEARING: CancerCare's Tips for Understanding Your Doctor

- **Use "I" statements.** If you're having trouble understanding something, saying *"I don't understand"* will be much more effective than saying *"You're being unclear."*
- **Be assertive.** If you don't know what a word means, ask. Make your questions specific and brief. If there is something you can't understand or resolve, ask your doctor if there is another time that the two of you can discuss it in more detail.
- **If something is unclear, try repeating it back to your doctor.** You might start with the words *"So you mean I should...."* If you understand better with visual aids, ask to see the X-rays or slides, or ask your doctor to draw a diagram.

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## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

Here are some questions you may want to ask your doctor or nurse to help you understand your treatment and follow-up:

- What are my treatment options?
- What is the recommended treatment?
- How often will I receive treatment?
- What are the possible side effects?
- What are the possible benefits and risks of this treatment?
- How much will my treatment cost?
- If I have questions during my treatment and my doctor is not available, who can I ask? For example, is a nurse, social worker, or other specialist available?
- Is there any information I can read about this treatment or procedure?
- Is there anything else I should know?



### CancerCare® Can Help

The professional oncology social workers at CancerCare know the importance of having good communication with the members of your health care team. We are available to help you with any concerns you may have in this area. CancerCare also offers other free services, including counseling, support groups, education, financial help, and referrals to other organizations that provide assistance. To learn more, call us at **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).



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