



The C-Word

COMING TO TERMS WITH A CANCER
DIAGNOSIS



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THE C-WORD

Receiving a Cancer diagnosis affects everyone differently, that's for sure. What we also know to be true is the diagnosis and road to recovery play a role in more than just the patient's life. Family, friends, and others look to get involved as much as they can, support and simultaneously deal with their own emotions around the diagnosis and process.

In this book, you'll find questions you should be asking your doctor, coping techniques, planning assistance, and more. You can use this book as a guide for your journey and conversation starter for those nearest you.

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK YOUR DOCTOR:



- What kind of cancer do I have?
- Where is the cancer?
- Has it spread?
- Can my cancer be treated?
- What is the chance that my cancer can be cured?
- What other tests or procedures do I need?
- What are my treatment options?
- How will the treatment benefit me?

- What can I expect during treatment?
- What are the side effects of the treatment?
- When should I call the doctor?
- What can I do to prevent my cancer from recurring?
- How likely are my children or other family members to get cancer?

Consider bringing a family member or friend with you to your first few doctor appointments to help you remember what you hear.

You might also want to consider how much you want to know about your cancer. Some people want all the facts and details, so they can be very involved in the decision-making process. Others prefer to learn the basics and leave details and decisions to their doctors. Think about which approach works best for you. Let your health care team know what you'd prefer.

1

KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

Maintain honest, two-way communication with your loved ones, doctors and others after your cancer diagnosis. You may feel particularly isolated if people try to protect you from bad news or if you try to put up a strong front. If you and others express emotions honestly, you can all gain strength from each other.

2

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

This can improve your energy level. Choose a healthy diet consisting of a variety of foods and get adequate rest in order to help you manage the stress and fatigue of the cancer and its treatment.

Exercise and participating in enjoyable activities also may help. Recent data suggest that people who maintain some physical exercise during treatment not only cope better but also may live longer.

3

TRY TO MAINTAIN YOUR NORMAL LIFESTYLE

Maintain your normal lifestyle, but be open to modifying it as necessary. Take one day at a time. It's easy to overlook this simple strategy during stressful times. When the future is uncertain, organizing and planning may suddenly seem overwhelming.

4

LET FRIENDS AND FAMILY HELP YOU

Often friends and family can run errands, provide transportation, prepare meals and help you with household chores. Learn to accept their help. Accepting help gives those who care about you a sense of making a contribution at a difficult time.

Also, encourage your family to accept help if it's needed. A cancer diagnosis affects the entire family and adds stress, especially to the primary caregivers. Accepting help with meals or chores from neighbors or friends can go a long way in preventing caregiver burnout.

6

REVIEW YOUR GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Determine what's really important in your life. Find time for the activities that are most important to you and give you the most meaning.

If needed, try to find a new openness with loved ones. Share your thoughts and feelings with them. Cancer affects all of your relationships. Communication can help reduce the anxiety and fear that cancer can cause.

ANTICIPATE POSSIBLE PHYSICAL CHANGES

Now — after your cancer diagnosis and before you begin treatment — is the best time to plan for changes. Prepare yourself now so that you'll be better able to cope later.

Ask your doctor what changes you should anticipate. If drugs will cause hair loss, advice from image experts about clothing, makeup, wigs, and hairpieces may help you feel more comfortable. Insurance often helps pay for wigs, prostheses and other adaptive devices.

Members of cancer support groups may be particularly helpful in this area and can provide tips that have helped them and others.

Also consider how treatment will impact your daily activities. Ask your doctor whether you can expect to continue your normal routine. You may need to spend time in the hospital or have frequent medical appointments. If your treatment will require a leave of absence from your normal duties, make arrangements for this.



How Will This Impact My Finances?

Many unexpected financial burdens can arise as a result of a cancer diagnosis. Your treatment may require time away from work or an extended time away from home.

Consider the additional costs of medications, medical devices, traveling for treatment and parking fees at the hospital.

Many clinics and hospitals keep lists of resources to help you financially during and after your cancer treatment. Talk with your health care team about your options.

Questions to ask include:

- Will I have to take time away from work?
- Will my friends and family need to take time away from work to be with me?
- Will my insurance pay for these treatments?
- Will my insurance cover the cost of medications?
- How much will my out-of-pocket costs be?
- If insurance won't pay for my treatment, are there assistance programs that can help?
- Do I qualify for disability benefits?
- How does my diagnosis affect my life insurance?

Talk to other people with cancer

Sometimes it will feel as if people who haven't experienced a cancer diagnosis can't fully understand how you're feeling. It may help to talk to people who have been in your situation. Other cancer survivors can share their experiences and give you insight into what you can expect during treatment.

You may have a friend or family member who has had cancer. Or you can connect with other cancer survivors through support groups. Ask your doctor about support groups in your area or contact your local chapter of the American Cancer Society. Online message boards also bring cancer survivors together. Start with the American Cancer Society's Cancer Survivors Network.

Fight Stigmas

Some old stigmas associated with cancer still exist. Your friends may wonder if your cancer is contagious. Co-workers may doubt you're healthy enough to do your job, and some may withdraw for fear of saying the wrong thing. Many people will have questions and concerns.

Determine how you'll deal with others' behaviors toward you. By and large, others will take their cues from you. Remind friends that even if cancer has been a frightening part of your life, it shouldn't make them afraid to be around you.

Create a Coping Strategy For YOU

Just as each person's cancer treatment is individualized, so is the coping strategy. Ideas to try:

- Practice relaxation techniques.
- Share your feelings honestly with family, friends, a spiritual adviser or a counselor.
- Keep a journal to help organize your thoughts.
- When faced with a difficult decision, list the pros and cons for each choice.
- Find a source of spiritual support.
- Set aside time to be alone.
- Remain involved with work and leisure activities as much as you can.

What comforted you through rough times before your cancer diagnosis is likely to help ease your worries now, whether that's a close friend, religious leader or a favorite activity that recharges you. Turn to these comforts now, but also be open to trying new coping strategies.



Questions To Ask Your Doctor

DURING TREATMENT

- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- Is there anything I can do to help manage side effects?
- What symptoms or side effects should I tell you about right away?
- How can I reach you on nights, holidays, or weekends?
- Do I need to change what I eat during treatment?
- Are there any limits on what I can do?
- What kinds of exercises should I do, and how often?
- Can you suggest a mental health professional I can see if I start to feel overwhelmed, depressed, or distressed?





Questions To Ask Your Doctor: After Treatment



- Will I need a special diet after treatment?
- Are there any limits on what I can do?
- What other symptoms should I watch for?
- What kinds of exercises should I do now?
- What type of follow-up will I need after treatment?
- How often will I need to have follow-up exams and imaging tests?
- Will I need any blood tests?
- How will we know if the cancer has come back? What should I watch for?
- What will my options be if the cancer comes back?



