

Colorectal Cancer: Treatment Questions



Talking with healthcare providers about cancer can be overwhelming. It can be hard to take in all of the information. It helps to be prepared. Make a list of questions and bring them to your appointments. Write the answers down in a notebook. Make sure you ask how the treatment will change your daily life, including your diet, and how you will look and feel after treatment. Ask how successful the treatment is expected to be, and what the risks and possible side effects are. You may also want to ask a friend or family member to go with you. They can take notes and write down the answers, and also ask questions you may not think of. You can also ask your healthcare provider if you can record the conversation.

Below are some questions to ask during your appointments.

Deciding on a treatment

- What are my treatment choices?
- What treatment do you think is best for me? Why?
- What are the goals of treatment?
- What is the success rate of this particular treatment for my type and stage of cancer?
- What is the average life expectancy for someone with my stage of cancer getting treatment?
- How much experience do you have treating cancers like mine?
- Will you be able to perform sphincter-saving surgery (for rectal cancer)?
- Will treatment affect my ability to have children?
- Should I get a second opinion?
- Are there any clinical trials I should look into?

Getting ready for treatment

- How soon do I need to start treatment?
- What is the length of the treatment period?
- How long will each treatment take?
- Where do I have to go for the treatment?
- Who will give me the treatment?
- Does someone need to go with me during treatments?
- Can I drive myself or take public transportation to treatment?
- Do you have someone on staff who can help me with transportation problems, financial concerns, or other resources?
- Can I take my other medicines during treatment?

Coping during treatment

- How will I feel during and after the treatment?
- Will I need a temporary or permanent colostomy?
- What side effects can I expect?
- How long will side effects last?
- Will there be side effects I need to call you about?
- How do I report concerns during evenings, weekends, and holidays?
- What can I do to ease the side effects?
- Will I be able to go to work and be around my family?
- Should I change my diet? What foods can't I eat?
- Are there support groups nearby or online that I can join?

After treatment

- How will I feel after the treatment?
- Do I need to follow a special diet?
- What type of follow-up will I need after treatment?
- How will we know if treatment worked?
- What are my choices if the treatment doesn't work, or the cancer comes back?
- What are the symptoms I should look out for?

Making a decision

When you have answers from your healthcare provider, it's time to think about your preferences. Think about what side effects you can and can't tolerate. Talk about all of your concerns with your healthcare provider before making a decision about treatment.

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