



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## WHEN TO GET A SECOND OPINION

People who are diagnosed with cancer often experience a wide range of emotions, as well as a sense of urgency to get into treatment as soon as possible. Usually with a new diagnosis there is a period of time, depending on the cancer type and stage, before treatment begins. During this time, getting a second opinion may be an essential and necessary component of treating one's diagnosis.

### HOW A SECOND OPINION CAN HELP

- Confirm your diagnosis
- Determine if the cancer has spread
- Offer a different medical perspective (such as from a radiation or surgical oncologist)
- Determine the availability of clinical trials or alternative therapies that apply to your treatment plan
- Additional treatment options
- Lend confidence in how to proceed with your care

### SITUATIONS WHERE A SECOND OPINION MAY BE IMPORTANT

- You have a rare or unusual cancer
- You feel uncomfortable with your doctor, the diagnosis or the certainty of your diagnosis
- Your health insurance requires it
- The treatment offered has side effects or risks that you find disconcerting
- The treatment offered will result in unacceptable or unreasonable demands on your life and your family
- Your doctor's treatment goals are different from your own
- Your cancer is not responding to your current treatment

### THE FIRST STEP: TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

Many people feel reluctant to seek a second opinion. People living with cancer and caregivers are often concerned that asking about a second opinion will create an uncomfortable relationship with their doctor, which may negatively affect their medical care. Other patients may be confused by the complexity of the health care system, too overwhelmed or intimidated by their diagnosis or unaware that they have that right to a second opinion. However, most medical professionals expect a patient to get a second opinion.



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**Discuss getting a second opinion with the doctor who diagnosed you.** Most doctors welcome a second opinion. It provides you and your doctor with either confirmation of their diagnosis and treatment, more details about their diagnosis, additional treatment options or recommendations for alternative diagnoses and treatments. Your doctor may have suggestions or referrals.

**If not, contact a medical society associated with your cancer type, an academic medical institution or a National Cancer Institute-designated facility.** It is strongly advised that you seek a second opinion at a different medical institution, since this will involve different clinics and pathologists.

**It's important to be clear and upfront.** Here are a few statements that can help start the conversation with your doctor:

- “I respect your opinion but I would like to speak with one other expert before starting your recommended treatment. How can I proceed?”
- “I need the reassurance of a second opinion and I'd like to talk with another doctor to be sure. What is the next step?”
- “This is all so new to me and I feel that a second opinion could help give me clarity.”

### **AN ONCOLOGY SOCIAL WORKER CAN HELP**

Oncology social workers understand the complex issues that can arise when considering a second opinion. An oncology social worker can help you navigate this process and make you feel comfortable talking with your health care team. CancerCare's professional oncology social workers can help, free of charge. To speak with a professional oncology social worker, call 800-813-HOPE (4673).



### **CancerCare® Can Help**

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include resource navigation, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit [www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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*This activity is supported by Takeda Oncology.*



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