



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

AFTER A PANCREATIC CANCER DIAGNOSIS: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

A diagnosis of pancreatic cancer can leave you and your loved ones feeling uncertain, anxious and overwhelmed. As your health care team talks about your diagnosis and treatment, ask questions about anything you don't understand. Good communication with your doctor will help improve the quality of the care you receive. Before your appointments, it's a good idea to bring a list of questions to the appointment and write down the doctor's responses. In addition, if possible, bring someone with you to any appointment; another set of ears can help reduce confusion.

HERE IS A LIST OF QUESTIONS THAT YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM:

Since I've been diagnosed, I've been overwhelmed. How can I better cope with my diagnosis? A cancer diagnosis turns a person's world upside down emotionally and physically. Your team of doctors, nurses and social workers are valuable sources of support as you cope with a cancer diagnosis. Oncology social workers are licensed professionals who counsel people affected by cancer, providing emotional support and helping people access practical assistance. CancerCare's oncology social workers provide individual counseling, support groups and locate services face-to-face, online or on the telephone, free of charge. To learn more, visit www.cancerca.org or call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

What type of pancreatic cancer do I have? Pancreatic cancer occurs when the cells found in the pancreas begin to change and grow uncontrollably, forming a tumor (also called a nodule), which can be either cancerous or benign. The main types of pancreatic cancer are adenocarcinoma and ampullary cancer.

What stage is my tumor? A tumor's stage refers to its size and extent of spread in the body—e.g., whether it has spread to lymph nodes or other organs. Cancer that has spread to other organs is called metastatic cancer. A cancer's stage is often denoted by a Roman numeral (I, II, III or IV). The higher the numeral, the more the cancer has spread within the body.

What is my recommended treatment plan? Depending on the information that your doctor has learned about your tumor, your treatment options may include surgery, radiation, targeted treatments, chemotherapy or palliative surgery.

What side effects might I experience throughout my treatment plan? Keep in mind that side effects can vary from person to person, and can be treated by your health care team. A key to managing side effects is to be aware of them and communicate with your health care team when they arise. Report them right away—don't wait for your next appointment. Your health care team can help you cope with side effects of pancreatic cancer treatment.

(over)

What is jaundice and should I be concerned?

Jaundice is common in people with pancreatic cancer that begins in the head of the pancreas. It is caused by blockage of the bile duct, a small tube that carries bile from the liver and gallbladder to the upper part of the small intestine. Symptoms may include loss of appetite, weight loss, nausea, itching and yellowing of the skin and eyes. Talk to your doctor right away if you experience any symptoms or side effects.

Should I seek a second opinion? 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 help give you a peace of mind or an alternative treatment possibility. Talk to your health care team and read CancerCare's 'When to Get a Second Opinion' fact sheet for more information.

Should I change my diet? Since the pancreas helps digestion, it's essential that you talk to your health care team about your diet. Visit the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network's 'Nutrition Tips for Pancreatic Cancer' fact sheet for more helpful diet hints.

What are pancreatic enzymes? A healthy pancreas secretes a number of substances called enzymes that help with digestion. Everyone needs a different amount of pancreatic enzymes to help with digestion. Pancreatic cancer can obstruct the release of these enzymes, but these can be replaced by supplements. If you have been prescribed pancreatic enzymes, it may take some time to find the dose that work best for you. Let your health care team know if you feel a change in your stools or increased cramping.

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 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 professional oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercares.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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Is there a clinical trial I can participate in? If so, will it be covered by my insurance? Clinical trials are the standard by which we measure the worth of new treatments and the quality of life of patients as they receive those treatments. For this reason, doctors and researchers urge people with cancer to take part in clinical trials. Read CancerCare's 'Clinical Trials: What You Need to Know' fact sheet to learn more information on clinical trials.

SURGERY AS A TREATMENT OPTION

Surgery is not a treatment option for everyone. Surgery may be an option for people whose tumor is located in the "head" of the pancreas, or in the regions adjacent to the head such as the "body" or "tail" of the pancreas. If surgery is a treatment option for you, here is a list of questions that you may want to ask your health care team beforehand:

- Can surgery remove my tumor? Why or why not?
- What is a Whipple procedure and is this an option for me?
- Why is surgery the best option for me?
- What experience do you have performing pancreatic surgeries?
- How can I prepare for surgery?
- What can I expect recovering from surgery to be like?
- Will I need to be on medications after the surgery?
- Will this surgery limit me from being physically active? If so, for how long?
- What are the short term and long term effects of surgery?

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