



CANCERcare®

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# fact sheet

## AFTER A BLADDER CANCER DIAGNOSIS: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

**A diagnosis of bladder cancer can leave you and your loved ones feeling uncertain, anxious and overwhelmed. Your doctors' appointments will provide the best opportunity to speak with members of your health care team. Getting as much information as you can about the goals of your treatment and how it will affect your life will help you feel more satisfied with your care.**



### THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

Your team of doctors, nurses and social workers are valuable sources of support as you cope with a cancer diagnosis. Good communication with your doctor will help improve the quality of the care you receive. 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. For more information on talking with your doctor, read CancerCare's booklet titled, "Communicating with Your Health Care Team."

### 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, financially 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](http://www.cancerca.org) or call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

**What type of bladder cancer do I have?** Bladder cancer occurs when the cells found in the urinary bladder (typically in the innermost lining) begin to change and grow uncontrollably, forming a tumor (also called a nodule), which can be either cancerous or benign. The main type of bladder cancer is urothelial carcinoma, also known as transitional cell carcinoma.

**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.

(over)

**What is my recommended treatment plan?** There are a wide range of treatments for bladder cancer, including surgery, intravesical therapy and chemotherapy.

**Can treatment affect my fertility?** Some treatment options like surgery may affect reproductive organs. If surgery is the best option for you, ask your doctor how surgery will affect your sexual health and fertility.

**What side effects might I experience throughout my treatment plan? Will my treatment affect my ability to urinate?** A key to managing side effects is to be aware of them and communicate with your health care team when they arise. To help you get relief from side effects, your doctors and nurses need to know specific details about your symptoms. By keeping a side effect journal and bringing it with you to medical appointments, you can have this kind of information ready to share with them. Some of the things you may want to write down in your journal include:

- How long a side effect lasts
- The date and time a side effect occurs
- What impact the side effect has on your daily activities. For example—does pain keep you from sleeping?
- How strong the side effect is. For example—if you experience pain, how strong is it on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 equals no pain and 10 is the worst pain possible? Read CancerCare's fact sheet titled, "Pain and Symptom Management: Talk to Your Health Care Team" for more information on talking to your doctor about pain.

**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.

**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.



### **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.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org) or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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