

# After A Skin Cancer Diagnosis: Questions To Ask Your Doctor

**A diagnosis of skin cancer can be overwhelming. This fact sheet will tell you:**

- How to prepare for your appointments
- What actinic keratoses are
- What questions will help you learn more about your diagnosis



## The Importance of Communicating With Your Health Care Team

Your team of doctors, nurses and social workers are there to help. Here are some tips for your appointments.

- **Bring a list of questions.** This will help you remember important things to ask. Write down or record the responses so that you do not forget them.
- **Consider bringing a loved one with you.** A friend or a family member can help ask questions and provide emotional support.
- **Ask questions about costs.** Knowing how much your treatment and medications might cost can help you plan ahead and focus more attention on getting better.

If your doctors and nurses do not know every answer, they may be able to guide you to those who do.



## What Are Actinic Keratoses?

Actinic keratoses are small, flaky pieces of skin look a little bit like a scab. They can appear on the forehead and other parts of the face, as well as the neck, hands, arms and chest—all areas exposed to the sun.

Actinic keratoses are common, and many cause no problem. However, some may develop into skin cancer and therefore should be monitored carefully. Make sure you let your health care team know if you have actinic keratoses.



## Questions That You May Want to Ask Your Health Care Team

The following questions should help you learn key information about your diagnosis and situation.

“What type of skin cancer do I have?”

Skin cancer occurs when the cells found in the skin begin to change and grow out of control. The main types are melanoma, basal cell, squamous cell and merkel cell carcinoma.

“What stage is my skin cancer?”

A cancer stage means its size and how much it has spread in the body. The higher the number (I, II, III or IV), the more it has spread.

“What are my treatment options?”

There are many kinds of treatments for skin cancer. These can include surgery, radiation, targeted treatment and chemotherapy.

“Is there a clinical trial available to me?”

Clinical trials test new approaches based on known and effective treatments for cancer. Doctors often urge people to take part in clinical trials if they are available.

“Is surgery an option for me?”

If surgery is an option, your health care team can help you get ready. They should be able to explain what the surgery does, what recovery is like and what the effects may be.

“How can I cope with my emotions?”

In addition to loved ones, you can find help in places of worship, support groups and counseling. Activities such as meditation and relaxation exercises can also help.

### 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.

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