



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

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

A diagnosis of colorectal 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 comfortable with your diagnosis and 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 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?** There are a wide range of treatments for colorectal cancer, including surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and targeted therapies. Surgery is the most common treatment for colorectal cancer, and is often highly effective if cancer has not spread to other parts of the body.

(over)

**What side effects might I experience throughout my treatment plan?** A key to managing side effects is to be aware of them and communicate with your health care team when they arise. Your health care team can help you cope with side effects of colorectal cancer treatment.

**Should I change my diet?** It's important to talk with your health care team, both during and after treatment, about your diet. You may develop sensitivities to particular foods you didn't have before. Find out if your doctor has a registered dietitian (RD) on staff or can recommend one. RDs are experts in diet and nutrition and can advise you about eating right.

**What is a colostomy and is it a treatment option for me?** Sometimes when cancer is detected in your colon or rectum, a colostomy is performed. A colostomy surgically creates a "stoma" or small opening in the lower abdomen through which stool can exit the body. Usually, the waste is captured in a small bag that is worn on the body and can be easily disposed of. While this procedure will have an obvious impact on your daily routines, keep in mind that you will still be able to do all the things you enjoy, including physical activities, and continue to live a full life with a colostomy. Talk to your health care team if a colostomy is the best treatment option for you.

**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.



**I was recently diagnosed with colorectal cancer and I am concerned about passing this to my children. What screenings or tests do you recommend for them?** The screening recommendations for children of individuals living with colorectal cancer are based on many factors so it's important to ask your doctor. The typical recommendation is for children to undergo their first colonoscopy when they are 10 years younger than their parent was at the time the parent was diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

#### **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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