

After A Colorectal Cancer Diagnosis: Questions To Ask Your Doctor

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

- How to prepare for your appointments
- What a colostomy is and how it is used
- 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 Is a Colostomy and Is It an Option For Me?

A colostomy is sometimes part of treatment for colorectal cancer. This is a surgery that creates a small opening in the lower abdomen beneath your stomach through which waste can exit your body. This opening is sometimes called a “stoma.” The waste usually goes into a small bag that is worn on the outside of the body. This waste can then be removed.

Talk to your health care team about whether a colostomy will be part of your treatment. It may affect your daily activities, but may be important to getting better.



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.

“Should I change my diet?”

You may have difficulty digesting certain foods. Your doctor may recommend a registered dietitian who can help.

“What stage is my colorectal cancer?”

A tumor’s 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 colorectal 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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