



CANCERcare®

800-813-HOPE (4673)  
info@cancer.org  
www.cancer.org

fact sheet

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

**A diagnosis of brain 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. 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.

It's also important to talk to your health care team about the cost of your care. Research shows that many patients do not feel comfortable asking their doctors how much treatment is going to cost and many doctors do not normally bring it up either. If possible, it is important to find out the cost of your medications before starting treatment. Your doctor may not know the answer, but he or she should be able to refer you to a social worker, pharmacist or hospital financial specialist who can help. 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.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org) or call 800-813-HOPE (4673).

**What type of brain cancer do I have?** Brain cancer occurs when the cells found in the brain begin to change and grow uncontrollably, forming a tumor (also called a nodule), which can be either cancerous or benign. The brain cancer most commonly diagnosed is glioblastoma.

**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 brain cancer, including surgery, radiation, targeted treatment and chemotherapy.

## Does cognitive therapy have benefits for people with glioblastoma?

It is not uncommon for people being treated for glioblastoma to experience some degree of cognitive change, including problems with attention, memory and information processing. Cognitive therapy (also called cognitive remediation) can help patients cope with and overcome these challenges. Cognitive therapy includes:

- Teaching strategies to help you carry out daily activities, such as using a notebook or daily planner.
- Using “task analysis”—breaking tasks into steps to make them easier to achieve.
- Incorporating attention-enhancing games and exercises, designed to improve retention and recall, into your daily life.

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.

**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.

## SURGERY AS A TREATMENT OPTION

Surgery is not a treatment option for everyone. 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?
- Why is surgery the best option for me?
- What experience do you have performing brain 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?

## 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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National Office • 275 Seventh Avenue • New York, NY 10001

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