



CANCERcare®

800-813-HOPE (4673)
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fact sheet

AFTER AN ESOPHAGEAL CANCER DIAGNOSIS: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

A diagnosis of esophageal 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.

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.cancercaare.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 esophageal cancer, including surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, targeted therapy and endoscopic treatments.

I'm worried about the cost of my cancer treatment. Where can I find financial assistance? The financial costs associated with cancer are often overwhelming, even with insurance. Read CancerCare's fact sheet titled, "Sources of Financial Assistance" for reliable resources. You can also visit CancerCare's searchable, online database of financial and practical assistance guide at www.cancercaare.org/helpinghand. This comprehensive online tool features up-to-date contact information and descriptions for hundreds of national and regional organizations offering financial help to people with cancer.

Should I see a doctor that specializes in esophageal cancer? Finding a doctor who specializes in esophageal cancer can significantly improve the recovery process and cancer survivorship. It's important to find a doctor who understands the intricacies and dynamics of living with an esophageal cancer diagnosis. You want to find a doctor who regularly treats esophageal cancer and can address the needs of people living with this diagnosis. To find a doctor who specializes in treating esophageal cancer you may first want to consult with your primary care physician and request a referral. For more information about hospitals,

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cancer treatment facilities and surgical centers, contact:

- American Society of Clinical Oncology's website, Cancer.Net, offers a "Find an Oncologist" database that allows you to search by many different criteria, including area of specialty, board certification, and location.
- The National Cancer Institute (www.cancer.gov or 800-4-CANCER) publishes a list of NCI Designated Cancer Centers.

A representative from your health insurance company may also assist you in seeking a doctor whose specialty is esophageal cancer. Speaking with your insurance representative could also help you understand your coverage and learn whether or not you are allowed to go out of network to see a specialist.

What side effects can 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. Report them right away—don't wait for your next appointment. Your health care team can help you cope with side effects of esophageal cancer treatment. 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?

ESOPHAGEAL CANCER RESOURCES

CancerCare

800-813-HOPE (4673)
www.cancercare.org

American Cancer Society

800-227-2345
www.cancer.org

The Esophageal Cancer Awareness Association (ECAA)

www.ecaware.org

National Cancer Institute

800-422-6237
www.cancer.gov

Cancer.Net

www.cancer.net

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 or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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