

WHAT QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK MY DOCTOR?

Coping with a diagnosis of cancer and researching the various treatment options can be a stressful experience. The following are some suggested questions to ask during your treatment stages.

Questions to Ask Before Treatment

- What type and stage of cancer do I have?
- What is the purpose of radiation treatment for my type of cancer?
- How will the radiation therapy be given? Will it be external beam or brachytherapy? What do the treatments feel like?
- How long will I receive radiation? How many treatments will I receive per week?
- What are the chances that radiation therapy will work? Are there any other effective treatments?
- What is the chance that the cancer will spread or come back if I do not have radiation therapy?
- Will I need chemotherapy, surgery or other treatments? If so, in what order will I receive these treatments? How soon after radiation therapy can I start them? How will the treatments be coordinated?
- Is there a clinical trial for which I might be eligible? Should I participate in a clinical trial?
- What are the benefits and risks of treatment including short-term and long-term side effects?
- What are some of the support groups I can turn to during treatment?
- Will radiation therapy affect my ability to have children?
- If I have questions after I leave here, who can I call or email?
- How should I prepare for this financially?
- Do you take my insurance? Is there a co-pay?
- Is this the most convenient location for treatment (close to home or work?)

Questions to Ask During Treatment

- Can I drive myself to and from the treatment facility? Where should I park?
- What side effects may occur from the radiation treatment and how are they managed?
- Do I need a special diet during or after my treatment?
- Will I be able to continue my normal activities?
- Can I smoke or drink alcohol?
- Is it safe to take vitamins or other supplements during treatment?
- How can I expect to feel during treatment and in the weeks following radiation therapy?



Questions to Ask After Treatment

- What are reasons that I should call you after my treatment ends?
- How and when will I know if I am cured of cancer?
- What are the chances that the cancer will come back?
- How often do I need to return for checkups?
- What are the concerning long-term side effects? How can I monitor for these?
- How soon can I go back to my regular activities? Work? Sexual activity? Exercise?



Questions to Ask About Radiation Safety

Radiation is a safe, highly effective cancer treatment. However, because radiation is invisible and works inside your body, it can be hard to put your trust into a treatment you can't see, touch or smell.

Each radiation therapy treatment team has many safety checks to ensure that each treatment is given as planned. However, some patients and caregivers have very technical questions about radiation therapy. It is perfectly acceptable to have questions about how your radiation treatment works, how accurate the targeting is, side effects you may experience and the safety of the treatments.

For those interested in the technical aspects of radiation, here are some questions you may want to ask your radiation oncologist about the quality assurance at the clinic where you will be receiving therapy.

Training/Education Questions

- Is my radiation oncologist certified by the American Board of Radiology (ABR)? When does his or her certification expire?
- What are the certifications and qualifications of the medical physicist?
- Do the doctor and physicist review each patient's plan? How often?
- Do the staff here participate in multidisciplinary tumor boards?
- Do all staff regularly participate in continuing medical education?
- Tell me about the staff training given before using new technologies.



Treating Planning Questions

- Who is involved in planning my radiation treatment?
- How is the treatment plan checked to make sure it is best for me?
- What procedures do you have in place so that the treatment team is able to treat me safely?
- How can I be assured that my treatment is being done correctly every day?
- What is the difference between a medical error and a side effect?

Questions for During Treatment

- What kinds of safety checks do you perform each day?
- How often does the medical physicist check that the various machines involved during my treatment are working properly?

Questions to Ask After I Finish Treatment

- If I have side effects after my treatment, who can I call? You? My primary care doctor?
- I have a question about a radiation treatment I had many years ago. Who should I call?

General Questions

- If the equipment isn't working and my treatment is delayed or postponed, who checks that it is safe to use again? And will this delay affect my cancer?
- Do you have weekly chart rounds where you review patient-related information in peer review?
- Will you take imaging scans regularly during my treatment to verify position of my treatment? Who reviews those scans?