



Ask about your cancer medicines

Questions to help you get the best from
your chemotherapy and cancer medicines

Ask about your cancer medicines

This guide is to help you get the best from your chemotherapy and cancer medicines.

It has questions that you can ask the people treating you – your cancer doctors, nurses or hospital pharmacist. Of course you can ask them anything you like: these are just examples to help you. Use this booklet to write a list of your own questions.

Don't feel that you have to ask all of your questions when you next see your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. You can always make another appointment, or speak to them by telephone, if you want to discuss things further.

If you need more information, you can contact:

CancerBACUP freephone helpline: 0808 800 1234
Open 9am – 8pm Monday to Friday

CancerBACUP website: www.cancerbacup.org.uk

It's important that you are clear about what treatment means for you. Making decisions about treatment can sometimes be very difficult. If you feel that you can't make a decision, ask more questions – or ask for more time to think about it.

The guide is divided into three sections, for different times during your cancer experience:

Thinking about treatment

Questions you can ask about cancer treatment before you make any decisions

Choosing treatment

Questions you can ask when choosing the treatment that is best for you

Taking treatment

Questions you can ask once you've started taking or having your treatment

Ask About Medicines website: www.askaboutmedicines.org

Thinking

Questions you can ask about cancer treatment before you make any decisions.

Questions like these may be difficult to ask and there may not always be a definite answer.

- What will my treatment involve?
- What is the chance of treatment curing my cancer?
- When will I know if the treatment has worked?

Sometimes it can feel awkward or embarrassing to ask about practical issues like these, but your cancer team will understand.

- Are there any financial costs to me? Will I have to pay for any prescriptions?
- Do I need any more tests before treatment?
- Do I have to have the treatment offered to me?
- What will happen if I don't have the treatment?
- Can I get a second opinion?



TIP: It's a good idea to tell a health professional about any other medicines, remedies or supplements you are already taking.

Always check if you are not sure what terms like these mean, so that you can be sure that you understand the choices you have been offered.

- What do you mean by cancer stages?
- What is a primary cancer?
- What is a secondary cancer?
- What are survival rates? What do you mean by X per cent improvement in survival?
- What is a remission?
- What is palliative treatment?

Getting more information about your cancer and how it is treated can help you to feel more in control of the situation.

- Are there any national guidelines for my cancer? (see www.nice.org.uk or www.cancerbacup.org.uk)
- Where can I get more information about my condition?

Choosing

Questions you can ask when choosing the treatment that is best for you.

It's important to know what your choices are so that you can make the right decision about your treatment. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will be able to help you make these decisions.

- How useful will this treatment be in my situation?
- How will the treatment work?
- Will I have tablets? Injections? Drips?
- How soon will the treatment start?
- How long will the treatment last?
- How many courses of treatment will I need?

- What side effects does the treatment have?
- How likely is it that I will get these side effects?
- Are there any possible long-term effects?
- Can this treatment increase my risk of developing another type of cancer?

- What does it mean to take part in a clinical trial?
- I've been offered a trial – do I have to go on it?

- What are my rights as a patient? Will I always see a cancer specialist?
- Are these my only options? Are there any other treatments or choices?
- Can I change my mind after I've started?
- How can I make a choice between the treatments you have offered me?

Getting answers to practical questions like these can help you organise your life to make things as easy as possible during treatment.

- Will I have all my treatment at this hospital, or will I have to travel?
- How long will I need to stay in hospital?
- Can I have my treatment at home?

- What effect will the treatment have on my daily life? Will I be able to continue at work? Can I still go on holiday?
- Will I still be able to look after my children?
- Will the treatment affect my fertility or my sex life?
- Is there any help/support I can have at home?
- Is any financial help available?



TIP: Your cancer nurse can help you find financial support or help at home.

Taking

Questions you can ask once you've started taking or having your treatment.

It is good to know how your treatment works and how to take it safely.

- What does this treatment do?
- How long will I be on this treatment?
- How and when should I take it?
- Do I need to change my lifestyle when I am having this treatment? Can I drink alcohol? Do I need to change what I eat? Can I still exercise regularly?
- What do you mean by adjuvant therapy?

Sometimes there can be uncertainties about treatment.

- How will I know that the treatment has worked?
- How will the doctors know if the treatment is working?
- Will I need to have any more tests?
- If my treatment is delayed, will this make a difference?

If you know what to expect from your treatment it can help you to cope.

- What are the side effects and how can they be controlled? What should I do if they happen to me?
- If I am having lots of side effects can I stop my treatment?
- Are there any complementary therapies that might help?
- What will happen after my treatment has finished?

It is a good idea to know who can help if you have any problems during your treatment.

- Who will be looking after me while I have my treatment?
- Does my GP know about my diagnosis and treatment?
- Who should I contact if I have any problems? How long should I wait before contacting someone?
- Who should I contact in an emergency?



TIP: The CancerBACUP helpline is staffed by cancer nurses, 9am – 8pm, Monday to Friday.

This guide was produced by CancerBACUP and Ask About Medicines, with an unrestricted educational grant from Roche, under the terms of the Ask About Medicines Week sponsorship policy.

