

Questions to Ask your Doctor

We have compiled a checklist of questions that you may want to ask your medical team. Please feel free to print off a copy and take along with you when you are seeing your doctor. If you or someone you love is facing a cancer diagnosis it can be hard to know what to ask - here are some useful starting points.

Before Treatment Begins

- What kind of cancer do I have?
- What stage is my head and neck cancer?
- Is there anything unique about my cancer that makes my prognosis better or worse?
- Can I do anything to make my prognosis better or worse?
- Can you help me stop smoking? (If you are a smoker)
- Should I get a second opinion?
- Can you recommend a colleague to give a second opinion?

Cancer Treatment

- What is the goal of treatment—to cure my head and neck cancer or stop it from growing?
- What are my treatment options?
- Are there any alternative treatment options?
- How will each treatment option help me?
- What risks or potential side effects are associated with each treatment?
- What research studies (“clinical trials”) are available?
- Are there any clinical trials that are right for me?
- How long will I receive treatment, how often, and where?
- How will it be given?
- How will I know if the treatment is working?
- How might a disruption in my chemotherapy dose or timing affect my results?
- How and when will I be able to tell whether the treatment is working?
- What are the names of all the drugs I will be taking?
- Can I talk with another of your patients who has received this treatment?
- What types of lab tests will I need?
- Will I need x-rays and scans?
- Can you explain the results of my complete blood count (CBC)?
- Are there tests for the genetic makeup of my head and neck cancer?
- Will I benefit from having my head and neck cancer evaluated for its genetic makeup?
- How frequently will I get the tests?

Side Effects of Treatment

- What possible side effects should I prepare for?
- When might they start?
- Will they get better or worse as my treatment goes along?
- How can I prepare for them or lessen their impact?
- Are there treatments that can help relieve the side effects? What are they? Do you usually recommend or prescribe them?
- Which risks are most serious?
- Will I require blood transfusions? Why?
- How can I best monitor myself for complications related to either my disease or my treatment?
- Will my type of chemotherapy put me at risk for a low white blood cell count and infection?
- Can I help protect myself against infection right from the start of chemotherapy, instead of waiting until problems develop?
- Am I at special risk for infection?
- What are the signs of infection?
- How serious is an infection?
- How long will I be at risk for infection?
- What should I do if I have a fever?
- How are infections treated?

Daily Activities

- How will my head and neck cancer treatment affect my usual activities?
- Will I be able to work?
- Will I need to stay in the hospital?
- Will I need someone to help me at home?
- Will I need help taking care of my kids?
- Are there any activities I should avoid during my chemotherapy?

End of Treatment and Recovery

- What happens after I complete my treatment?
- How can I best continue to monitor myself for complications related to either my disease or my treatment?
- What kind of lab tests will I need? How frequently should I get those lab tests?
- What types of x-rays and scans will I need?
- How often do I need to come in for checkups?
- When will you know if I am cured?
- What happens if my head and neck cancer comes back?