

Talking to your doctor

Following their diagnosis, women often find themselves cast into unfamiliar territory. After your diagnosis, if not before, you will be seeing a range of doctors and health professionals you may never have seen before, who will all play a part in your overall care. At the same time you may be confronted with a whole new vocabulary, sometimes it will feel like you are learning a new language. It may feel as if you are expected to understand things you have never heard of before. All this can add to your feeling of things being out of your control. You can sometimes feel helpless and stupid. There is no reason why you should know what to expect when diagnosed with cancer. No one does. So although the people involved in your care may be very busy, they are used to people asking for explanations.

"When I heard that word `cancer', my mind went completely blank. I don't think I heard or understood a single word after that".

Remember:

- Asking for more information does not mean you are stupid. - It means you want to be involved. - This is good.
- Asking for something to be repeated does not mean you are stupid. - It means you are dealing with things that are new and scary. - This is understandable.

Getting the Most Out of Your Relationship with Your Doctor

1. Ask for the information that you need. This will help you feel better informed.
2. If you are worried about something - ask. It is better to find out than to worry.
3. Yes, doctors are very busy, but that does not mean that your questions are a waste of their time.

4. Take notes, or ask if you can tape record your conversation with your doctor so that later you can go over the information your doctor gives you. Make sure you write down any instructions that your doctor gives you.
5. If possible, bring a family member or friend along. Not only can they give you emotional support, they may remember more than you can.
6. If there are any pieces of information or medical terms used that you don't understand, ask for an explanation. The glossary on this page may help you.
7. Make sure you get all of your questions answered. If you feel that your doctor is rushing you, acknowledge that he or she has a busy schedule and request a follow-up consultation.
8. Ask who else might be able to provide you with useful information. Others may include other members of the treatment team, local support groups, or other resources in your area.
9. Let your doctor know of any changes in your health since your last visit, or since starting a treatment or medication.
10. Let your health care team know of any difficulties that you are experiencing. Try to be specific. For example - if you are having trouble sleeping you might say, "I've always been a good sleeper, but since my last treatment I find I don't get more than 4 hours sleep a night. I lie awake for a couple of hours before I fall asleep, and I wake up at 5am."

Having a question ready for your doctor is really helpful. It is a good idea to let your doctor know at the beginning of your consultation that you have questions. In this way he or she can make sure that there is enough time in the session to address your questions. Write down your questions. Questions that have been running around in your head for days before your appointment can fly right out of your head when you walk through the door of the doctor's office. The questions that follow are frequently asked of doctors following a diagnosis of gynaecological cancer.

Treatment options:

- What are my treatment options?
- What are the benefits of each treatment?
- What are the risks of each treatment?
- What treatment do you recommend?

Side effects:

- What are the short and long-term side effects of this treatment?
- What causes these side effects?
- How can I minimise these side effects?
- How will the treatment affect my ability to have children?

Managing Your Long-term Care:

- How often should I have a check-up?
- Who should I contact if I have any concerns between check-ups?