

You know yourself best

No one knows more about your body than you do. Not your partner, not your parents, not even your doctor. So when you talk with any health care provider about your health, remember that you have valuable information they can use. You know about changes in your body and about any problems you may be having. Share that information. Open and honest communication between you and your doctor is one of the best ways to make sure you get the care you deserve.



It really is all about you

While you may be overwhelmed by your diagnosis, it is still important to get the most out of each doctor's visit. Try following these guidelines:

1. Be prepared.

It is often helpful to gather information about your health concerns — from the library (books and medical journals), trusted Internet sites or fact sheets like this one. The more you know, the more comfortable you will be talking to your doctor.

2. Write down your questions.

Ask open-ended questions like, “What is my prognosis (expected outcome)?” Avoid closed-ended questions that will give you a “yes or no” answer — questions like, “Am I doing all right?” Start by making a list of 3 to 5 main questions you have for your doctor.

Make a copy of the questions for your doctor, too. This will help your doctor understand and address your specific concerns. Bring a voice recorder to capture your conversation so you can refer back to your doctor's responses.

3. Tell your story.

When your doctor comes in, ask if you can take a few minutes to briefly explain your situation and concerns. Be as specific as you can. Then give the doctor your list of questions and ask them.

4. Give feedback.

If your doctor's responses were helpful, say so. This kind of feedback will encourage your doctor to talk with you, listen to you and continue to help you.

Stay in control

If you have just received a diagnosis of breast cancer, it is possible that within minutes of telling you, your doctor will be talking about what treatment would be best for you. Yet you might want to take some time to make your treatment decision or to get a second opinion.

You can take some time. This is your life and your body. If you have cancer, this is new to you. The treatment options are even newer. If you need time to process all this new information about your health, ask for it. You have every right to take whatever time you need to deal with your emotions, learn more and explore your options.

Delaying a treatment decision for one day or even a couple of weeks seldom makes a difference between a good and bad outcome.

Resources

Susan G. Komen for the Cure® — promises to save lives and end breast cancer forever by empowering people, ensuring quality care for all and energizing science to find the cures. For information and support, call 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636), www.komen.org

American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons — offers information on cosmetic and reconstructive plastic surgery procedures and a plastic surgeon referral service. www.plasticsurgery.org

CancerCare® — provides free, professional support services for anyone affected by cancer. 1-800-813-HOPE, www.cancer.org

National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service — provides information and resources for patients, the public and health care providers. 1-800-4-CANCER, www.cancer.gov

Communication

Doctors are just like anyone else; they want to do their job well. That means doing whatever they can to help you stay healthy or to get better. Remember, although doctors may know a great deal about breast cancer, they may not truly understand or be aware of all that you are going through. You can help your doctor help you by sharing your feelings and concerns. Having a positive relationship with your doctor can improve your chances of successful treatment and recovery.

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Integrative and Complementary Therapies
- Follow-up
- Making Treatment Decisions
- Medical Vocabulary