

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 health care providers about your health, remember that you have valuable information they can use. You know about changes in your body and about any problems you are 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 need.



It really is all about you

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

1. Be prepared.

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

2. Organize your questions ahead of time.

You should be able to talk openly and honestly with your doctor about breast cancer to make sure all of your questions are answered. To help you get started, Susan G. Komen® has a series of 17 *Questions to Ask the Doctor* cards. Topics include: *Treatment Choices, Before Breast Surgery, After Breast Surgery, Radiation Therapy and Chemotherapy and Side Effects*. Each card contains key questions to discuss with your doctor.

Space is provided for you to jot down the answers. Also, be sure to bring some type of voice recorder to capture your conversation so you can refer back to it later. These questions will help your doctor understand and address your specific concerns. You can download and print these cards to take to your next doctor's appointment at www.komen.org/questions.

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 breast cancer diagnosis, it is possible that within minutes of telling you, your doctor will be talking about what treatment would be best for you. Take your time though. This is your life and your body. You have time to make a treatment decision or even get a second opinion.

If you have cancer, this is new to you. The treatment options are likely new to you as well. If you need time to process all this 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.

Waiting to make 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 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

The Komen message boards offer online forums for cancer survivors to share their experiences and advice with other survivors. <https://apps.komen.org/Forums/>

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.

Related fact sheets in this series:

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

The above list of resources is only a suggested resource and is not a complete listing of breast cancer materials or information. The information contained herein is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. Komen does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referenced herein.