



Tips for Talking with Your Health Care Team, Family, and Friends

For patients receiving treatment for head and neck cancer

You will be meeting with several caregivers as you receive care and treatment for cancer. Friends, family, and others will ask questions. This section of the Guide to Your Head and Neck Cancer Treatment offers tips to help you communicate well with those who care for, love, and support you.

Prepare

- **Before you visit with your doctor, prepare your “agenda.”** What are the reasons for your visit? What do you expect from your doctor?
- **Make a written list of your questions and concerns.** Being prepared means you are more likely to have your main concerns addressed.
- **Mention your main concerns at the start of the visit.** Try to be as open as you can in sharing your thoughts, feelings, and fears so that your doctor clearly understands your concerns.
- **Write down the answers to your questions.** This will help you remember and be ready to answer questions from other caregivers, family, and friends.
- **Keep track of how you are feeling and any changes you notice.** It is common for patients to answer that they are feeling fine when the doctor asks. Keeping track allows you to give an accurate summary of how you have been feeling since your last visit.
- **Give your doctor feedback.** If you don’t like the way you have been treated by the doctor or someone else on the health care team, let your doctor know. If you were unable to follow the doctor’s advice or had problems with a treatment, let your doctor know so changes can be made. Also, doctors appreciate positive comments. If you are pleased, let your doctor know.

- **Be prepared to describe your symptoms and issues to the doctor in a concise manner.** If a treatment has been tried, be ready to report on its effect.

Ask

When asking questions, these categories may help cover your most important concerns:

- **Diagnosis** – Once the diagnosis is known and you move past that step during visits, you may want to think of this category as diagnosis/prognosis.
- **Tests** – Ask how to prepare for tests, how accurate they are, how they will affect your treatment, and what is likely to happen if you are not tested.
- **Treatments** – Ask about treatment options. Include questions about lifestyle changes, medications, and surgery. Ask about the risks and benefits of treatment and what is likely to happen if you are not treated.
- **Follow-up** – Find out if and when you should return for a visit after treatment. Ask about symptoms you should watch for and what you should do if they occur.

Repeat

- Briefly repeat back to your doctor some of the key points from your visit and discussion.
- Repeating back also gives the doctor a chance to quickly correct any miscommunications or misunderstandings.
- If you don't understand something the doctor said, admit that you need to go over it again.

Take Action

- When the visit is ending, you need to clearly understand what to do next. Ask your doctor to write down instructions or recommend reading material if needed.
- If, for any reason, you can't or don't want to follow your doctor's advice, please share what you are feeling and thinking. Sometimes the doctor can make suggestions to help you overcome the barrier.

Questions?

Call 206-598-4022

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC Clinic staff are also available to help at any time.

Otolaryngology/Head and Neck Surgery Center: 206-598-4022

Tips for Talking with Family and Friends

- Be as open and honest as you can, right from the start.
- Try to show an understanding of the feelings your family or friends may be having about your cancer. This will help them and you, too.
- You may want to have a family meeting to share your feelings about having cancer. Invite those you love to do the same.
- Find ways to include your family in all aspects of your cancer experience. This helps you support each other.
- Accept offers of help from others. Be clear about what you want and do not want others to do for you. Keep in mind that your needs may change.
- Another way to help build a support network of family and friends is to be positive and motivated, while clearly asking for what you need or want.

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