

5 Things You Should Do Before Cancer Treatment

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If you just found out you need cancer treatment, there are ways to prepare yourself. Being ready will help you overcome the uncertainty and anxiety that so often goes along with starting treatment.

No matter what, remember who's in charge: you! Too many people don't realize that they — not their doctors — are in charge of their own health.

Here are five things you should do to help with your treatment:

1. Ask your doctor what the best and worst case scenarios are.

Whether you're facing chemotherapy, radiation or surgery, you need to know what to expect. Many people go into cancer treatment without knowing the possibilities. Then if a worst-case scenario happens, it catches them off guard. The most important way a physician can help you prepare for treatment is to clearly set expectations of the possible good — and bad — outcomes. This is also a great time to ask if you qualify for a clinical trial.

2. Educate yourself.

I don't discourage patients from looking online for information about their upcoming treatment. There are a lot of good resources there that will help you prepare:

- The American Cancer Society is a great starting point. Among their many resources is a guide to preparing yourself for cancer surgery.
- ChemoCare.com can help you understand how chemotherapy works and what you can expect from this treatment.
- Look for sites that are specific to your type of cancer. For those with kidney cancer, for instance, the Kidney Cancer

Association can educate and prepare you for nephrectomy, which is the most common first step for treatment of kidney cancer.

- Cleveland Clinic also offers treatment guides for 17 specific kinds of cancer.

3. Be proactive.

Provide all of your physicians with documentation about your conditions. Don't assume they have everything. Think of it as you would a financial adviser — you're paying him or her as the expert in how to handle your investments, but the money is yours and you're the boss.

4. Follow up.

Don't assume that a test result is normal just because you didn't hear anything about it.

5. Reach out for support.

Use online information only as a starting point. None of the information you find online is a substitute for a face-to-face discussion with a physician. Smart patients gather their information then bring it into my office and say, "What do you think?"

There are plenty of offline resources and other options as well:

- Talk to other patients.
- Find support groups for your type of cancer.
- Get a second opinion.

Cleveland Clinic Cancer Center offers services that address the emotional, psycho-social and financial needs of our patients. For more information or additional patient resources, visit clevelandclinic.org/cancersupport or speak with your care team.

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