

Cancer-Related Fear: Questions to Ask Your Care Team

Fear related to cancer relapse or progression can significantly impact a person's quality of life and is associated with anxiety, depression and isolation. It can hinder the ability to plan for the future.

If you regularly have worries about your cancer coming back or getting worse, talking with a member of your health team is a very good step to take.

This document can help initiate proactive discussions between patients and their health team about the cancer-related fear they are experiencing. Communication between patients and healthcare providers – including oncologists, haematologists, other doctors, nurses, and allied healthcare professionals – can have an important impact on a patient's psychosocial well-being and help reduce and address cancer-related fear.

Preparing

Before meeting with your healthcare provider there are several ways to prepare to make sure your questions are answered, and the information provided is retained:

- Write down your list of questions before the appointment. Also, prioritise the most important questions in case you run out of time during the appointment.
- Make sure you have a way to record the answers. Write them down in a notebook, take notes on a tablet or consider asking the healthcare professional if you can record the conversation to reference it later.
- Bring a family member or friend to the appointment so there is another person there for the conversation. They can help ask questions, record the answers and will also provide support during the discussion.
- You will need to speak openly with your doctor about your questions, concerns, and needs. Do not feel embarrassed to ask your doctor to repeat or further explain something.

Questions to Ask

Use this list of questions as a guide as you prepare for your discussion about cancer-related fear.

1. What is cancer-related fear? Why am I experiencing it?
2. Are there specific signs and/or symptoms to be aware of? When should I talk to my doctor or healthcare provider?
3. Is cancer-related fear normal? Do a lot of people experience it?
4. Are there different types of cancer-related fear? Is it the same for everyone?
5. Can cancer-related fear be treated?
6. Are there programs at this hospital / cancer centre that help address fear?
7. Can you refer me to a therapist or program that can help?
8. Is there a patient organisation / support group that can help?
9. Is there anything I can do at home to help address cancer-related fear?
10. Are there any other activities I can do that can help?
11. What can caregivers, friends or family do to help?
12. Will cancer-related fear affect me for the rest of my life?