

SUPPORT IS CARE

Asking for Supportive Cancer Care

A guide to getting the care you deserve.



Supportive Cancer Care is an essential part of high-quality cancer care that every person living with cancer deserves. Navigating a cancer diagnosis can feel overwhelming. It's normal to focus on treatment plans and medical details, but your care shouldn't end there. Whether you need help managing side effects, finding emotional support, navigating insurance, or coordinating practical needs, you have a right to care that supports every part of your life.

You have a voice in your care, and starting the conversation makes a real difference. Remember, asking for Supportive Cancer Care isn't asking for too much. It's asking for the care you deserve.

The questions and tips below can help you begin the conversation about Supportive Cancer Care. Use them to learn what services are available to you and advocate for what you need with your doctor or care team. Even if you don't remember your doctor or care team using the term "Supportive Cancer Care," these services are part of the quality care you have every right to ask for.



The prep checklist

Before your appointment

A few things to help you feel prepared and supported.

Prepare a list of your goals and hopes for quality of life during treatment. What matters most to you right now? Bring this list to help guide the conversation. And ask how Supportive Cancer Care services can support your goals.

Write down specific physical symptoms you're experiencing (fatigue, pain, nausea, sleep problems, etc.) and how they're affecting your daily life. Try asking yourself: What am I feeling? When does it happen? How does it affect me?

Note any emotional or mental health concerns (anxiety, depression, stress) you want to discuss and better manage.

List any practical challenges you're facing (transportation, finances, time off work, childcare, meals). Ask what services are available to support you.

Ask for a referral or information on nutritional support services to address how your diet can support your treatment and help manage side effects.

If possible, bring a support person (caregiver, friend, or family member) who can help take notes and advocate for your Supportive Cancer Care needs.

If you're going alone, you can take written notes or record the visit on your smartphone or another device. If you don't have a phone or prefer not to record, ask your care team if a social worker or care manager can join you to help capture information.

If you need interpretation, request translation services so you can get the information in the language you're most comfortable with.

If applicable, bring documentation of all medications, supplements, and current Supportive Cancer Care services you're using (therapy, dietitian, support groups). Your doctor or care team should see your complete care plan and help identify any additional support you may need.

During your appointment

Questions that can help guide your conversation.



Tip

Identify the three to four questions that are most important to you. Prioritize asking those first, so you don't run out of time.

- What Supportive Cancer Care services are available for me and my family?
- Can you walk me through my treatment plan and what to expect?
- How will side effects be managed and who should I contact if new symptoms develop?
- Can you please point me to mental health services like therapy or support groups that I can join?
- What nutritional support is available for me?
- What services can help me manage _____ (example: fatigue, pain, nausea) during treatment?
- What services can help me with _____ (example: transportation, meals, insurance paperwork)?
- Can you please provide a written visit summary and list of available Supportive Cancer Care resources discussed?

After your appointment

Simple steps to keep the support going.



Review notes with your loved ones or caregiver while the information is fresh. Then, send a follow-up message (email or patient portal) summarizing what you heard. Confirm the next steps, including any Supportive Cancer Care referrals or resources mentioned.



Follow up on all Supportive Cancer Care referrals (such as nutritionists or social workers) within a few days to schedule your appointments. Create a simple action plan: What do I need to do? Who should I call? When is my next appointment?



Create a list of support resources—including phone numbers, websites, and key contacts. Keep it somewhere easy to access, like a notebook, a notes app on your phone, or a document on your computer.



If you have caregivers or family members involved in your care, share the appointment information and list of available Supportive Cancer Care services with them.



Reach out to your care team if new symptoms develop or if you need additional Supportive Cancer Care services.

Helpful tips



Connect with others. You don't have to go through this alone. Ask your doctor or care team about support groups, counseling services, and online communities where you can meet people who understand what you're facing.



Share all symptoms and how you feel. Even small changes matter. Tell your doctor or care team the full picture, including how symptoms affect your daily life. This helps them recommend appropriate Supportive Cancer Care services like pain management, fatigue strategies, or nutritional support.



Take notes during appointments. Use your smartphone or a recording device to take notes so you can review them later. There is a lot to process and take in. Notes or recordings can help you remember important details.



Ask for help navigating your care. If you're attending appointments alone or need extra support, ask your doctor or care team if there is a social worker, patient navigator, translator, or care coordinator to help you understand your Supportive Cancer Care options and connect you with resources. You don't have to do this alone.



Be honest about your mental health. Anxiety, depression, and stress are normal during cancer treatment. Asking for mental health support is strength, not weakness.



Speak up about barriers to your care. Whether it's financial stress, transportation difficulties, or trouble managing side effects, tell your doctor or care team. These are the challenges Supportive Cancer Care is designed to address.



Keep records of your care. Track which services you're using, what's helping, and what you still need. This helps you and your doctor or care team adjust your support as your needs change. It may help to keep a folder at home with all your medical documents and notes in one place.



Ask questions. Never hesitate to speak up if something isn't completely clear. It's your doctor or care team's job to explain your care and make sure you understand what is happening.



Be patient with yourself. Give yourself grace as you navigate your care. Learning about all the support available to you, deciding what you need, and asking for help can feel overwhelming. It's okay if these conversations don't happen all at once.

Take the time you need to process information, ask questions, and advocate for yourself. Seeking Supportive Cancer Care is an ongoing journey, not a one-time conversation.



Additional patient resources

These resources offer personalized, practical, and emotional support to help you feel supported as you navigate treatment, survivorship, and everyday challenges.

Cancer Nation

The Survivorship Checklist is a simple, reassuring guide that walks you through the cancer journey, especially as you transition from treatment to life after. Created with survivors and healthcare experts, it helps ease confusion and reminds you that you're not alone in what comes next. Learn more at bit.ly/SurvivorshipChecklist

Cancer Support Community

This resource offers free support services designed around what you actually need—a helpline when you need someone to talk to, local and virtual programs, online communities, and resources that meet you where you are. It's support that shows up for you, whenever you need it. Learn more at bit.ly/CSCGetSupport

This guide does not provide medical advice. Always consult with your doctor or care team about your specific situation.