

Patient information from BMJ

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Lung cancer: questions to ask your doctor

If you've been diagnosed with lung cancer, you may want to talk to your doctor to find out more. Here are some questions that you might want to ask.

We have included questions to ask early on, and further questions that you might want to ask if you have been advised to have surgery, radiotherapy, or chemotherapy.

Questions to ask early on

- What type of lung cancer do I have?
- How far has it spread?
- Do I need more tests? What about a CT scan? (This is a special type of x-ray that can show where the tumour is in other parts of the body, such as the chest and brain.)
- What are my treatment options?
- What treatment do you recommend?
- What does the treatment aim to do?
- Will it help my symptoms?
- Will it try to get rid of my cancer?
- What side effects does the treatment have?
- What will happen if I decide not to have treatment?
- Are there any clinical trials that I might benefit from? (Clinical trials are studies designed to test whether a treatment works.)

Questions to ask if you're advised to have surgery

- Why are you recommending surgery?
- What will you do during the operation?
- Will it help my symptoms?
- How will I feel after the surgery?
- How long will I be in hospital, and what treatment will I need after surgery?

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- What could go wrong, and how likely is that?
- What happens if the surgery doesn't work?
- How many operations like mine have you performed?

Questions to ask if you're advised to have radiotherapy

- Why are you recommending radiotherapy?
- What does it aim to do?
- Will it help my symptoms?
- How will I feel during the treatment?
- What side effects can I expect in the weeks after my treatment?
- What can you do to prevent or relieve side effects?
- What side effects might I get months or years after my treatment, and will any of them be permanent?
- What happens if radiotherapy doesn't work?

Questions to ask if you're advised to have chemotherapy

- Why do you recommend chemotherapy?
- What does it aim to do?
- Will it help my symptoms?
- How will I feel during and after treatment?
- What are the side effects of treatment?
- What can you do to prevent or relieve side effects?
- What do I need to do if my white cell blood count is low? (Chemotherapy can lower your white cell count in your blood. This makes you more prone to infections.) Should I avoid crowded places? What should I do if a family member is ill?
- Will any of the side effects be permanent?
- What happens if the chemotherapy doesn't work?

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