

10 Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Being diagnosed with a brain tumor is scary and overwhelming. These 10 questions to ask your doctor will help get you started in learning about your tumor and what to do next.

1. What is the name and grade of my tumor? Is it a primary or metastatic tumor?

Tumors are classified by origin and behavior of the tumor cells. Some tumor types are assigned a grade, which signifies the rate of growth. This information is used to predict the tumor's likely behavior and will be useful as you do research.

Primary brain tumors originate in the brain itself and do not spread from the brain to other body parts, except in rare cases. In contrast, metastatic (or secondary) brain tumors, also referred to as brain metastases or lesions, are from cancer in other parts of the body. These cancer cells have either been carried to the brain by the blood or have spread from adjacent tissue. Brain metastases are most commonly from breast and lung cancers.

2. Is my tumor benign or malignant?

Benign tumors are slow-growing and can be removed or destroyed if they are in an accessible location. Malignant (cancerous) tumors are rapidly growing tumors that invade and destroy normal brain tissue. No one is certain why, but some benign brain tumors may change over time to become malignant. The distinction can be misleading because benign tumors can be as dangerous as malignant ones if they are in an inaccessible location, such as the brain stem, while some malignant tumors can be successfully treated.

3. What are the treatment options?

The standard treatments for brain tumors include surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy, though the specific combination may vary depending on the tumor type. Other treatment options may involve clinical trials, integrative

medicine, and treatment approaches that utilize a range of therapies and drug agents in combination with standard treatment. These additional treatment options are typically available through clinical trials or by the recommendation of the physician.

4. What are the possible side effects of each treatment option?

Side effects vary depending on specific treatments types and even between patients. Discussing potential side effects will help you to know what to expect so that you and your health care team can better monitor your health and manage your symptoms. Additionally, being able to determine whether a symptom is expected or unexpected with your course of treatment will help you to know when to call your doctor.

5. What factors do you look at to predict how I am going to do?

Every patient is unique, and each brain tumor behaves differently, so while your doctor may be able to tell you what to expect based on general statistics and previous cases of patients with the same brain tumor type, it is important for you to understand the factors and methods that the doctor will take into account as he or she monitors your progress.

6. Are there any clinical trials for which I am eligible, and what questions are those clinical trials asking?

Clinical trials, which are research studies designed to determine the safety and side effects of new trials, may be available to you. Participants in clinical trials receive high-quality medical care and are among the first to benefit if a new approach is proven effective. However, a new treatment may not necessarily be better than the standard treatment, and there may be unexpected side effects.

If you decide that you want to participate in clinical trials, the trial you choose will depend on your tumor type, previous treatments, how well you are functioning, and whether you meet the criteria that each trial has for its participants.

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7. If I wanted a second opinion from another neuro-oncologist or neurosurgeon, whom would you recommend?

All patients have a right to a second opinion, and most health care professionals acknowledge that right. Getting another physician to review your case can help to confirm an initial diagnosis or to compare suggested courses of treatment, especially if your physician is not a neuro-oncologist or doesn't have extensive experience with brain tumors. A second opinion should be done as soon as possible so that treatment is not delayed.

8. If I am more interested in quality of life rather than how long I live, which treatment would you recommend?

The situation, priorities, and needs of each patient are different, so it is important to have a detailed discussion with your doctor about the treatments available to you along with their potential side effects so that you can decide on the course of treatment that is right for you.

9. Which treatment would you take if you had my tumor?

Often, patients report feeling frustrated while talking to their doctors and this may be one way to get a clear recommendation from your doctor for a course of treatment, along with the reasoning and decision factors behind it.

10. How can I reach you or someone else in your office if I have questions after today?

Between the emotional impact of the initial diagnosis and the confusing medical terminology, patients and families are often overwhelmed by everything that goes on while they are at the doctor's office. Getting the contact information for your physician will be helpful when more questions arise after you return home or as you do more research.

For more information and how to reach us:

- Visit our website <http://www.braintumor.org>
- Email us at info@braintumor.org
- Call Patient Services at **800 934 2873**

We are happy to answer your questions about brain tumors, provide you with resources, and connect you to brain tumor survivors and support groups. If you have specific medical inquiries about brain tumors and treatments our Medical Information Specialist is an experienced neuroscience nurse available to answer your questions.

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