

A CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR TALKING ABOUT BREAST CANCER RECURRENCE

The purpose of this conversation guide is to help people undergoing treatment for early breast cancer feel more prepared when talking with their doctor about their diagnosis, treatment options, side effects, and risk of cancer recurrence. This guide provides tips for speaking with your doctor and sample questions to consider.

PREPARING FOR YOUR APPOINTMENT



**It's more than a medical appointment.
It's your time to talk about your care.**

- ☐ Think about the time you have with your doctor as a conversation between two people in partnership, working together to manage your health and care.
- ☐ Your doctor is there to listen to your concerns, answer your questions, and guide you throughout the entire process.
- ☐ Find out if you can bring someone with you to your appointment for support and to help take notes.
- ☐ If someone cannot join you, ask if you can record the visit or conference someone in via phone or video.



Write down your list of questions before your appointment.

- ☐ Write out a list of questions you want to ask your doctor before your appointment.
- ☐ Prioritize your list by placing your most important questions at the top.

Write down how you're feeling.

- ☐ This can include any new symptoms you have recently experienced, being as descriptive as possible.
- ☐ Consider tracking whether you are able to participate in regular activities.

DURING YOUR APPOINTMENT



Be honest about how you feel.

- ☐ If your doctor asks how you are doing or feeling, tell them exactly how you are feeling.
- ☐ Reference your notes about symptoms and side effects to be as descriptive as possible.
- ☐ Go beyond "I'm fine" or "I'm good." You know your body better than anyone else. Speak your truth.
- ☐ Don't be afraid to ask for additional information about anything you don't understand.



Keep the dialogue open and going.

- ☐ Remember to refer to your list of questions during your appointment.
- ☐ Take notes if you can. It can be a lot to process and being able to revisit the information can be helpful.
- ☐ If you run out of time, ask your doctor how you and your care team can keep the conversation going to get your questions answered.
- ☐ Ask if your care team or doctor's office has a patient portal or telehealth option so that you can review the doctor's post-visit notes, ask additional questions, and communicate with your care team without an appointment.
- ☐ You can also ask your doctor for a printed copy of your appointment notes.

THOUGHT STARTERS TO HELP YOU PREPARE YOUR QUESTIONS

Use this section to organize your discussion points and questions while you prepare for your next appointment.



Write down the questions you want to ask.

- ☐ List questions that can help you learn more about your specific type of cancer, such as:
 - What type of breast cancer do I have?
 - What is my hormone receptor status?
 - What is my HER2 status?
 - Does my cancer type have a high risk of recurrence?



Think about what's going well.

- ☐ Talk about your progress with your doctor.
 - Are you getting relief from your symptoms or from any side effects of active treatment?
 - Are there any tasks in your life that are getting easier to do?
 - Do you have any new improvements?

Discuss challenges and concerns.

- ☐ Talk about any concerns you may have.
 - Are symptoms getting worse or not improving?
 - Are any activities in your life getting harder to do?
 - Are you experiencing side effects from medications?
 - Are there any new changes that are challenging?
 - Are you experiencing any barriers to getting the treatment and care you need?
(Such as paying for care and medication, transportation, child or elder care, time off from work, or language barriers.)
 - Are you experiencing any changes to your mood?
 - Are you experiencing any changes in sleep?

- ☐ List the questions you have for your doctor about your treatment plan, such as:

- What treatment options do I have?
- How will each treatment benefit me?
- What can I do at home to help manage my treatment?
- What can be done to prevent my cancer from coming back?
- What side effects can I expect and what can be done to manage them?

- ☐ List questions you have about risk of the cancer coming back (also known as recurrence), such as:

- Is it possible that my breast cancer will return after treatment?
- Does my type of cancer place me at a higher risk for having a breast cancer recurrence?
- Are there any tests that can help us better predict my breast cancer recurrence?
If so, which test or tests does the doctor generally order?



☐ List questions about finding support, such as:

- Do you have any tips for helping me talk to my family about my cancer?
- Are there local or virtual support groups that I can join?

☐ Your questions can also be about how you feel or daily activities, such as:

- How can I feel better physically or emotionally?
- How can I continue doing [fill in the blank] activity?
- Will my breast cancer affect my personal relationships?



What do I want more information about?

☐ Decide what information you need to feel more comfortable and confident about your care and treatment plan. Is there anything you want to know more about or just need to be explained in a different way? This can be medical terms you're hearing or procedures or tests you might have to do in the future. Write them down and ask your doctor to explain them, why you need it, and its role in your treatment plan.



What should I expect next?

☐ Talk about the road ahead and what is coming next in your treatment and care plan.

REMEMBER, IF YOU DON'T GET ALL YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED DURING YOUR APPOINTMENT, THAT'S OK!

Keep the conversation going with your doctor to have open and honest discussions about what breast cancer is, as well as your specific diagnosis and treatment plan.

No question is too personal.

REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

There is a community of support groups and services that can connect you with others who have an experience with early breast cancer and care.