



What to do when facing a serious illness:

3 sets of questions to ask your health care team

Being told you have a serious illness can be very difficult. Often, people don't know what to expect. Talking with your health care team can help you understand your illness better. Asking questions is important, and people closest to you can also help by asking questions on your behalf if you would like.

1 What does it mean to have this serious illness?

All serious illnesses are different. Some serious illnesses can be cured, and others cannot be cured. Some illnesses can last a person's whole life. Others can get worse over time and shorten a person's life. Find out about the nature of your illness.

Ask your health care team:

- Can my illness be cured?
- Will my illness get worse over time?
- Will it shorten my life?

2 What can I expect now and in the future?

Experiences with serious illness are personal and different for everyone. However, each serious illness usually follows a general pattern based on the experiences of many others who have had the illness before. Understanding the pattern your illness might follow can help you know what to expect in each stage.

Ask your health care team:

- Can you explain the general pattern and the different stages of my illness?
- What stage of my illness am I in?

3 How can I get ready for what comes next?

There are important decisions to make throughout your illness. Following these steps will help you and the people closest to you prepare. The first step is to gather information from your health care team about what to expect along the way. The second step is to learn about where you are in the development of your illness. The third step is to think about what is most important to you. These steps will help you work with your health care team. They will also help you make decisions about your care.

Ask your health care team:

- What changes should I expect with my illness?
- What important decisions will I need to make as my illness changes?
- What can I do now to help me get ready?

Ask yourself:

- What is most important to me and those closest to me?
Share this information with your health care team.

Speaking up and asking questions can be hard. These 3 sets of questions can help you understand your illness and what comes next. They can also give you more choice and control and help you be more hopeful and prepared.

More information and resources

Information on serious illness and palliative care in Canada: Canada.ca/palliative-care

Resources for people living with serious illness and their families
(webpage in English, with resources available in both English and French):
www.waitingroomrevolution.com/resources-pages

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