

# Taking Control After a Cancer Diagnosis

You didn't choose this moment, and it isn't fair. Feeling scared, angry, or overwhelmed is normal. You're not alone. Use these steps to help organize visits, questions, and next actions.

## Immediate Steps for Clarity and Control

- Get your exact diagnosis in writing

Ask for copies of all pathology and imaging reports (with stage, grade, biomarkers) and the after-visit summary.

Enroll in your patient portal so you can download records anytime.

Understand diagnosis & staging – National Cancer Institute (if helpful to review later).

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- Schedule a second opinion early

Second opinions can confirm the diagnosis and surface new options.

Prioritize NCI-designated cancer centers or accredited programs.

Use NCCN patient questions as a guide when preparing.

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- Ask for a multidisciplinary review (tumor board)

Tumor boards combine multiple specialists to review your case.

Ask your care team if your case can be presented.

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- Understand options before agreeing to treatment

For each option ask: goal (cure/control/symptom relief), expected benefit, risks/side effects, alternatives, and lifestyle impact.

Request a written plan with timelines and how success will be measured.

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- Discuss biomarker / molecular testing (when relevant)

Ask if your cancer type typically has biomarkers that guide therapy (e.g., HER2, MSI, PD-L1, EGFR, ALK).

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- Consider clinical trials early

Trials can offer cutting-edge care — ask which trials may fit your diagnosis and stage.

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- **Bring a support person and a notebook**

Have someone take notes and help ask questions; consider asking permission to audio-record visits.

Ask for a patient navigator or oncology social worker.

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## **Build Your Care Team**

- **Oncologists matched to your cancer type**

Verify board certification and experience.

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- **Specialized centers and accredited programs**

Consider NCI-designated centers and CoC-accredited hospitals.

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- **Essential allies**

Oncology nurse, pharmacist, dietitian, social worker/patient navigator, supportive/palliative care.

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## **Fertility, Family, and Life Planning**

- **Fertility preservation**

Discuss options before treatment if future pregnancy is desired.

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- **Advance care planning**

Complete an advance directive and designate a healthcare proxy.

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## Talking to Family and Workplace

- Family

Share what's known, set boundaries, and offer concrete ways people can help (rides, meals, notes).

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- Work

Know rights (ADA, FMLA), request accommodations, and document agreements.

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## Mental Health & Safe Information Habits

- Mental health

Ask for counseling or support groups — it's okay not to feel positive all the time.

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- Information habits

Limit online searching and stick to reputable sources.

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## Integrative & Everyday Wellness

- Nutrition & activity

Modest regular activity and balanced diet tailored to treatment tolerance.

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- Supplements

Discuss all supplements with your oncologist due to interactions.

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- Fatigue & symptoms

Track sleep, pain, nausea, energy to guide care adjustments.

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## Track Progress with Measurable Markers

- Clinical markers

Tumor markers, key labs, imaging responses.

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- Daily life markers

Weight trends, symptom scores, activity tolerance.

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- Treatment log

Dates, doses, side effects, key labs — keep for quick reference.

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## Find a Cancer Specialist Near You

- Search US News doctors

Enter ZIP code to find oncology specialists in your area.

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- NCI Cancer Centers

Search NCI-designated centers for specialized programs.

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- CoC Hospital Locator

Find Commission on Cancer accredited hospitals.

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- Search ClinicalTrials.gov

Look up trials by cancer type and location.

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## Gentle Next Steps You Can Take Today

- **Top three questions**

Write down your top three questions for your next visit.

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- **Second opinion**

Call to schedule a second opinion at an NCI or CoC center.

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- **Patient navigator**

Ask your clinic to connect you with a patient navigator or social worker.

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- **Trusted contact**

Choose a trusted person to coordinate support and logistics.

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This guide provides general information and is not a substitute for personalized medical advice. Always discuss decisions with your oncology team.