

What to do when facing a serious illness:

3 sets of questions to ask your health care team

Receiving a diagnosis of a serious illness can be overwhelming. Often people don't know what the journey will look like. However, there are things you can do to help you communicate with your health care team. For example, you and those closest to you can ask **key questions** to make sure you understand your illness.

Health Canada Santé Canada

Canada

1 What does it mean to have this serious illness?

Not all serious illnesses are the same. Some can be cured while others can't. A person might have the illness their entire life. And some serious illnesses will get worse over time and shorten the person's life. It is important to know the nature of the illness.

Ask your health care team:

- → Is the illness curable?
- → Will it get worse over time?
- → Will it shorten my life?

2 What can I expect now and in the future?

Every person's experience is unique. But each serious illness has a general pattern based on the many people who have had it before. Thus, it's possible to learn what the illness looks like in the early, middle and later stages. Having a general sense of this pattern will help you understand where you are at in your illness and what you can expect in each stage.

Ask your health care team:

- → Can you explain the big picture and the different stages of the illness?
- → Am I currently in the beginning, middle or later stage of my illness?

3 How can I prepare for what might come next?

Throughout the illness there will be times when you need to make important decisions about what to do next. Combining information about what to expect, where things are now and what is most important to you will help you work with your health care team. Doing this will help you make decisions about your care that are right for you and those closest to you.

Ask your health care team:

- → Can you explain what milestones and decision points are ahead in my illness and how we can plan for them?

Ask yourself:

- → What's most important to you and those closest to you? Share this information with your health care team.

Speaking your mind and asking questions can be intimidating but can help you and those closest to you understand your illness journey. These 3 sets of questions will help you be more informed, have more choice and control, and be more hopeful and prepared.

For more information

Information on serious illness and palliative care in Canada: **canada.ca/palliative-care**
Waiting Room Revolution – for information and resources to help patients and families who are facing serious illness (English only): **waitingroomrevolution.com**

The Waiting Room REVOLUTION

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