

What is prognosis?

The estimate or likely course and outcome of a disease is called a prognosis. It can be hard to understand what a prognosis means to you and what matters in your life and can sometimes be hard to talk about. Many people want to know their prognosis. For some, having a better understanding of their cancer and what to expect can often be helpful in making decisions. For others, they may not want to know the course or outcome of their disease. You need to let your care team know upfront what you want to know or don't want to know about your prognosis.

What knowing your prognosis can help with is making some decisions you may face that may include:

- Which treatment is best for you
- If you want treatment or not
- How best to care for yourself and which side effects you are willing to experience
- Practical planning to address personal affairs

If you do decide you want to know more, your doctor knows the most about your situation and is in the best position to discuss your prognosis. They can provide you the information you feel would be most important for you to prepare for your future.

Content adapted from websites below.

How much do you want to know?

Deciding how much you want to know about the cancer and its treatment is the first step in being able to talk comfortably with your doctor. Some patients desire more information, while others prefer less.

- Tell your health care team your preferences for receiving information about your prognosis and chance of recovery or recurrence
- Don't be afraid to tell your doctor how much or how little you want to learn.
- Ask if there are learning resources available and see education resources below.

Some people want to know:

- statistics and chances of surviving or may search for this information on their own. Be sure you go to reputable resources for this information. See below or ask your care team for their suggestions
- the future in terms of possibilities of being able to participate in a special date or event
- if the cancer is incurable, will treatment slow the cancer and prolong life. What side effects will the treatment cause.
- It is up to you to decide how much information you want.

Some factors that affect prognosis include:

- The type of cancer and where it is in your body.
- The stage of the cancer, which refers to the amount of the cancer and if it has spread to other parts of your body
- The cancer's grade, which refers to how abnormal the cancer cells look under a microscope. Grade provides clues about how quickly the cancer is likely to grow and spread.
- Certain traits of the cancer cells and what treatments are available for those traits.
- Your age and how healthy you were before cancer.
- How your body responds to the treatment.

Resources for Additional Information:

- [NIH, National Cancer Prognosis, Understanding Your Cancer Prognosis](#)
- [NIH, Understanding Cancer Prognosis](#)
- [NIH, Questions to Ask Your Doctor about Your Diagnosis](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Cancer Facts and Statistics](#)
- [American Cancer Society, 24/7 questions about cancer or need help finding resources, 800-227-2345](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Understanding Statistics Used to Guide Prognosis and Evaluate Treatment](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, El pronóstico del cancer](#)
- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer Preguntas para el doctor sobre su diagnóstico](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Cómo entender las estadísticas usadas para orientar el pronóstico y evaluar el tratamiento](#)