



NSCLC consultation companion

If you have been diagnosed with advanced non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), you will likely come across several different healthcare professionals during your care. Here's a breakdown of who they are and how they will help you. The people you meet will depend on your specific type of cancer, so don't worry if you don't meet everyone. The suggested questions can be used in consultations to help you make informed decisions about your treatment. Your questions will be specific to your situation, but the table below contains some general questions to get you started.

Medical oncologist

This is your main cancer doctor. They will plan and oversee your treatment, including medicines like chemotherapy, targeted drugs, and immunotherapy. You'll see them regularly to discuss your progress and any side effects that you might be experiencing.

You could ask:

- Am I eligible for biomarker test(s)?
- What kind of biomarker tests?
- How long will it take to get my biomarker test results?
- What does biomarker testing mean for my treatment?
- What are the specific goals of my treatment plan?
- What side effects should I expect from my treatment, and how can we manage them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- Are there any clinical trials available that might be suitable for my condition?
- Is radiation therapy an option for me?
- Is surgery an option as part of my treatment plan?
- Am I eligible for any targeted therapies?

Pathologist

A pathologist is a doctor who examines your tissue samples in the lab to identify the type of cancer you have and its specific characteristics. This information is used to determine the best treatment plan for you.

It is unlikely that you will meet the pathologist directly; however, this specialist plays a crucial role in diagnosing your cancer and determining the best treatment option. Your medical oncologist will be able to answer any questions you have about the tests carried out by the pathologist. For example:

Before the test

- Will I receive numbing medication or a sedative to reduce pain and/or keep me calm?
- What will I need to do before, during and after the biopsy and how long the procedure will take?

After the test

- What kind of cancer do I have?
- What stage is my cancer?
- Does my cancer have biomarkers?
- How will test results influence my treatment plan?

Radiation oncologist

You will meet with this specialist if your treatment includes radiation therapy. They will plan and carry out your radiation treatments.

You could ask:

- How effective is radiation therapy in treating NSCLC?
- How is it delivered?
- How many sessions will I need?
- How long will each radiation treatment session take?
- What should I expect during radiation treatment?
- What are the potential side effects of radiation therapy, and how can they be managed?
- Are there ways to minimize damage to healthy tissue?
- Will radiation therapy affect my daily activities, and if so, how?

Thoracic surgeon

For some people, the best form of treatment may be to have an operation to remove all or part of the lung. Other patients may require special tests that will need to be done as a minor operation. In these cases, you will be referred to the thoracic surgeon.

You could ask:

- What are the risks and benefits of the surgery you recommend?
- What will recovery be like?
- How long is the recovery period after surgery?
- What should I do to prepare for the surgery?
- What kind of follow-up care and additional treatments will I need after surgery?

Radiologist

A radiologist is a doctor who looks at and interprets your imaging tests (e.g., X-rays, PET/CT scans, MRIs, and bone imaging scans) to see where the cancer is and how it's responding to treatment.

While you might not meet the radiologist directly, their detailed reports help guide your treatment plan. Your medical oncologist will be able to answer any questions that you have about radiologist's reports. For example:

- Where is my cancer spreading to?
- How is my tumor responding to treatment?
- What kind of changes do my latest imaging results show?

Pulmonologist

This lung doctor helps manage breathing problems and other lung-related issues you might have (e.g., plural effusion, pneumonitis, etc.). They also perform tests to see how well your lungs are working.

You could ask:

- How is my lung function being affected by cancer?
- How can I improve my lung function during treatment (e.g., breathing exercises, holistic treatments)?
- How can I prevent infections and other complications related to my lungs?
- Should I avoid specific activities or environments?
- What symptoms should I watch for that might indicate a problem with my lungs?
- Are there breathing exercises or therapies that can help me?
- What complications could I develop and how will these be treated?

Oncology nurse

These nurses are there to support you through your treatment. They can help you understand your treatment plan, manage side effects, and coordinate your care.

You could ask:

- Who should I contact if I have questions or problems between appointments and after hours?
- How can I best prepare for my appointments?
- How can you help me manage the side effects of my treatment?
- What kind of symptoms should I report immediately?
- Are there any lifestyle changes that can help me feel better?
- Can you provide resources or support groups for emotional and mental health?

Genetic counselor

A genetic counselor helps explain the results of genetic tests, which can provide important information about your cancer and how it can be treated. They can also help you understand what these results mean for your family members.

You could ask:

- What genetic tests will be performed, and what can they tell us about my cancer?
- How might the results of these tests affect my treatment options?
- What did my latest test results show?
- How is my tumor responding to treatment?
- What are the implications of these genetic findings for my family members?

Cardiologist

These experts assess and monitor your heart health, especially if you have existing heart conditions or if your treatment could impact heart function. They may perform tests such as electrocardiograms (ECGs) and echocardiograms to assess your heart's condition. They work alongside oncologists to manage any cardiovascular risks associated with treatments and provide care for heart-related issues.

You could ask:

- What tests will you perform to assess my heart health before starting cancer treatment?
- How will my existing heart conditions affect my cancer treatment?
- What symptoms should I watch for that might indicate heart problems during treatment?
- How will cancer treatment affect my heart health?
- What tests will you conduct to keep track of my heart function whilst receiving treatment?
- Are there lifestyle changes I should consider to support my heart health?

Clinical research coordinator

If you qualify for a clinical trial to try new treatments, this person will provide you with information so that you can decide if you want to participate in a clinical research study. They will guide you through the process, explaining what to expect and keeping track of your progress.

You could ask:

- What are the benefits and risks of participating in this clinical trial?
- How will my participation in the trial affect my current treatment plan?
- What should I expect in terms of extra visits, tests, or procedures as part of the trial?
- How can I best prepare for my appointments?
- What kind of side effects should I expect?
- Can I participate now and change my mind later?
- Will it cost me anything to participate in this study?
- Will I get compensated for participating in this study?



Palliative care specialist

This specialist will help you manage your symptoms, improve your quality of life, and your emotional well-being.

You could ask:

- How can you help improve my comfort?
- What kind of pain management options are available to me?
- How can you help to manage my energy levels and treat my fatigue?

Dietitian/nutritionist

This expert will provide you with dietary guidance to help you maintain your strength and manage possible treatment side effects.

You could ask:

- How can you help me maintain my weight?
- Are there any foods I should avoid during my specific treatment?
- Are there any foods that can help me manage my treatment side effects and maintain my health?

Pharmacist

You will meet with the pharmacist to learn about your cancer medications and supportive drugs, how to take them correctly, and how to manage any side effects.

You could ask:

- How should I take my medications, and are there any specific instructions I need to follow?
- What should I do if I miss a dose of my medication?
- Are there any foods, drinks, supplements, or other medications I should avoid while on this treatment?
- Can you help me understand the potential interactions between my cancer medications and other drugs I am taking?
- Are there any side effects to watch out for?
- Are there generic options for my medications?

Psychologist/counsellor

These specialists are trained to provide emotional support and coping strategies.

You could ask:

- Are there support groups for me and my family that can help to manage the emotional impact of my diagnosis?
- How can you help me manage stress and anxiety?

Pulmonary rehabilitation specialist

These specialists include critical care nurses, exercise physiologists and/or registered respiratory therapists working with pulmonologists to reduce respiratory symptoms and improve quality of life.

You could ask:

- Will breathing exercises and retraining reduce my respiratory symptoms and help me return to work and my favourite leisure activities?
- What strategies can I use at home to alleviate my respiratory symptoms?
- Are there specific breathing techniques that can help me?
- How can exercise benefit my lung health?
- What types of exercises are safe and appropriate for me?

My questions

My notes