

Making choices

When you have cancer, it can seem that there are an awful lot of people who want to be involved in deciding what is best for you. This can include your family, consultant, nurses, social worker, youth support worker, your partner and friends, teachers and employers.

While it's great that so many people are working to get you through cancer, it's important to make sure you have the opportunity to take part in the discussions about your health and treatment, if you want to.

This information sheet outlines how you can become involved in making choices and how to make the right decisions for you.

Some decisions will have to be made by your consultant or nurse, who are the experts on your medical health. However, there will also be some choices you can make for yourself – so don't let other people take over if you don't want them to.

Then again, there may be times when you don't want to be involved in making decisions. That's alright too.

You may find that your doctors, family, teachers or employers make assumptions. They may assume that you don't mind when or where you have your treatment, that you don't want to go to your work Christmas party or on a school trip. If they're wrong, it's important to let them know. They might not always be able to meet your wishes, but sometimes they will – and it never hurts to remind them that you've got a mind of your own!

Taking control

Making your own decisions and being assertive can help to make you feel that you're in control and that the cancer hasn't taken over your life completely. You can still have fun, still go out with your friends, and still be 'you'.

Start as you mean to go on

It's a good idea to begin asking questions and making your own choices as early as possible, so your medical team and loved ones get used to including you in discussions and decision-making.

That said, if you're too tired, ill or unsure about speaking up at the beginning of your treatment, don't worry. It's never too late to start.

Talk to your doctor

To make the right decisions for you, you will need all the facts.

The best place to start is by talking to your consultant. They can help you investigate the possible medicines and treatments for your kind of cancer. If you've got lots of questions, you could try writing them down and giving them to the consultant.

If you're not sure where to start, there is a list of questions that other young people have asked – or wish they had asked – on the CLIC Sargent website. You may find that these questions help you get the facts you need.

Once you've got your consultant's answers, ask them to keep you informed on what's happening and how your treatment is progressing, so that you can make decisions based on the most up-to-date information.

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You'll never know unless you ask

Some parts of your treatment simply have to happen at a specific time or in a definite order. But there are some other things that could be up for discussion.

- If you're not getting on well with a treatment, ask if there are alternatives. Someone may just have assumed you'd prefer the one you're on
- If you would prefer to share a ward with older or younger people, you may be able to move
- If the schedule you've been given means that you would have to miss out on something that you wanted to attend, like a friend's party or a crucial football match, ask whether it's possible to delay the next stage of your treatment. It may not be a problem at all.

Sometimes your consultant or nurse will tell you that what you're asking for isn't safe or practical, or your family won't be able to make alternative arrangements to allow for your change of plan. But you'll never know what's negotiable, or what the alternatives are, unless you ask. Perhaps you can agree on some kind of compromise that would suit everybody.

If you want to make a really big change, you might want to talk to your nurses first and see what they think. If it's truly not possible, they can tell you. If it is an option, they may be able to put your idea to the consultant for you, or help you talk to your parents or your partner.

Everybody wants you to get well, and you'll make more progress if you're happy. So if you find yourself in a situation where others seem to be making all the decisions for you, and you're wondering if you should say something, remember that you always have a right to ask.

Do you have more questions, or need some help?

CLIC Sargent has been working with young people for over 20 years, and we understand what you're going through. Our care professionals include social workers, youth support workers and nurses, who provide clinical, practical and emotional support. Talk to your CLIC Sargent care professional, or call us on **0300 330 0803*** and we'll put you in touch with someone who can help.

You can also visit our website at www.clicsargent.org.uk or email us on info@clicsargent.org.uk

* Calls to 03 numbers are charged in the same way as calls to a geographic (01 or 02) number. Check your phone contract to see how much you pay for this type of call - it may be included in 'inclusive minutes'.

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For information about the sources used to put this publication together, or if you have any comments or queries about it, please contact us on 0300 330 0803 and ask to speak to the information manager.

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