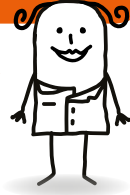


# A second opinion

## Do you think that you need to get a second opinion?

Many people just don't feel right about getting a second opinion on a medical matter, but you shouldn't worry!



Asking for a second opinion may not be a legal right, but most doctors and consultants will be happy to help you get one.

There are many good reasons why you might want to get a second opinion on a diagnosis or a suggested treatment.

"Sometimes people can get frustrated because it can take longer for their doctor to work out what is going on than they expected," says Professor Steve Field, a GP and chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners. "People can lose faith in their specialist – they may feel they are being pushed towards an operation before they are ready. Or sometimes they feel as if their specialist is not dealing with them as if they were a whole person."

GPs and consultants understand that people want second opinions either because they don't like the doctor they've seen, don't like what they've been told, or have more than one treatment option and need help deciding which to pursue. Let's face it, if you have been given a life-changing diagnosis you may want to make sure your doctor is right!

You can change your GP simply by finding another one in your area. If you want a second opinion from a different consultant, however, you need to ask your GP. What happens next depends on the alternatives

available. You may need to be referred to another hospital – your GP can also ask your consultant for clarification on this. Patients usually remember only 10% of what they are told, and their GP can help them to navigate through what is happening to them.

If you do need to see a second specialist, ask your GP who they would recommend. You can also search on [Google Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/) to see who has published research in a field relevant to your case.

You don't have to tell your existing consultant who has been treating you if you're going to see someone else, but you may want to in order to copy your notes and test results to take with you. When you go for your second opinion, think about what you want to know, write it down and take a friend with you to help you remember what questions to ask and what the answers were! These can be stressful situations so it is quite normal not to remember everything you are told. Remember not to cancel any appointments with your old consultant before you get your second opinion, just in case you get the same advice about the best way forward.



## Why people get a second opinion

**People may want to see another doctor for different reasons, including:**

- to confirm their diagnosis
- to make sure they are having the best treatment
- to support what they've already been told about their condition and treatment
- because they don't feel that they can talk to their current doctor

**The benefits of seeing another doctor may include:**

- feeling reassured that doctors agree on your diagnosis and treatment
- having some different treatment choices to choose from if the second doctor offers a different treatment

**Seeing a different doctor is not always possible and may sometimes have disadvantages. These include:**

- a possible delay in starting treatment
- travelling some distance to another hospital – this could be difficult or even impossible
- hearing your diagnosis again, which may be distressing

It can take some time to arrange a second opinion. You will have already seen a doctor or specialist, so you won't be a priority. It is important to talk to your doctor about how long any delay is likely to be and whether a delay in starting treatment would be harmful.

**Some people worry about offending or upsetting their doctor by asking to see someone else. This is unlikely to happen. In any case, doctors themselves often ask their colleagues about cases that are complicated or unusual.**

## Things to think about

Before you ask for another opinion, think carefully about exactly why you want one. This can avoid wasting time, effort (and possibly money) if you see another doctor privately. It may be because:

- you haven't fully taken in what the doctor has told you
- you are not satisfied with the treatment suggested
- you find it hard to talk to your doctor

### YOU HAVEN'T FULLY TAKEN IN WHAT THE DOCTOR TOLD YOU

If you have been unable to take it all in the first time round, it may help to ask your doctor to go over things with you again. Don't feel embarrassed about not understanding, or needing information repeated. Doctors realise how difficult it is for you to take in complicated medical information, especially if you are feeling shocked and upset.

If you have read up on your condition since you were first diagnosed, this could have raised questions or concerns. You may just need to talk through your treatment options with your specialist again. This will give you the chance to ask any questions that have come up since your first appointment.

### YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE TREATMENT SUGGESTED

Of course you are likely to meet other people with cancer at the hospital, or at a local support group for example. It's natural to talk to each other about your illness and treatment. You will hear a lot about cancer through the media, on the news or in newspapers. You may hear about another type of treatment and wonder why you are not having it. This might make you feel less confident about the treatment you are going to be having. If you are feeling this way do talk to your doctor or specialist nurse.

There are many different types of cancer and the treatments will vary. Even if you have the same cancer type as someone else, your cancers may be at different stages. Not all treatments are suitable for everybody.

## YOU FIND IT HARD TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

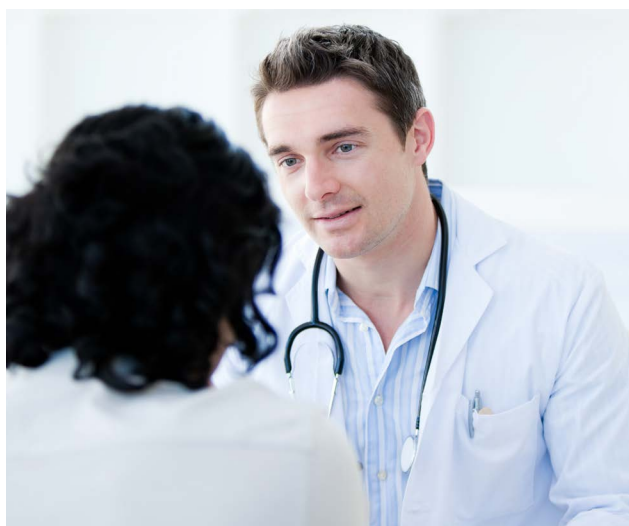
It can be difficult if you do not feel comfortable talking to your doctor. It is very important for you to have confidence in them and feel able to voice any concerns you may have. This can help to build trust and confidence in your relationship.

If you would prefer, try talking to another doctor in the consultant's team, such as the registrar. Or, if there is a specialist nurse in the team, you may find it helps to talk to them. They may be able to iron out any misunderstandings. If necessary, they may offer to talk to the doctor about your concerns. It can be useful to talk to your doctor and nurse together.

### How to get a second opinion

After thinking everything through, if you still want to see another doctor, you can ask your specialist or GP to arrange it. They will refer you to another NHS doctor who specialises in treating your condition. You can ask for a second opinion from a private doctor, but obviously you will have to pay for this. A relative can also ask for a second opinion, but only with the patient's consent.

Having a second opinion doesn't mean that the new doctor will automatically take over your care. If you decide you want the new doctor to treat you, both doctors have to agree and this has to be formally arranged between the doctors or hospitals.



Your current doctor or specialist should send the new doctor any relevant information, such as previous treatments, test results and information about the drugs you are taking. This will give them as clear a picture as possible about your case.

If you are having difficulty getting referred for a second opinion, the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service** in your hospital, or the local **Citizens Advice Bureau** may be able to offer advice.

### Before your appointment

It may help to prepare for your second opinion by:

- thinking about what you want to get out of the appointment
- making a note of your symptoms and any treatment you have already had
- writing down questions you want to ask
- asking someone to go with you for moral support and to help you take in the information the doctor gives you

**In the end, it is always you, the patient, who decides what treatment to have. Do make sure you are happy with what is happening. If you are in any doubt, ask more questions. And if that means a second opinion – go for it.**



### **About Fight Bladder Cancer**

Fight Bladder Cancer is the only patient and carer led charity for bladder cancer in the UK.

At Fight Bladder Cancer, we take great care to provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate facts about bladder cancer. We have a very supportive medical advice panel made up of some of the best professionals working with bladder cancer, and hope that our information will add to the medical advice you have had and help you to make decisions.

To donate, go to our **Just Giving** page:

[justgiving.com/fightbladdercancer](https://www.justgiving.com/fightbladdercancer)

or text **FBCD00 £5 to 70070**

Registered charity **1157763**

Please note that our services are not intended to replace advice from your medical team.

Robert House  
Station Road, Chinnor,  
Oxon OX39 4DJ  
**01844 351621**

YOU CAN FIND A WEALTH OF INFORMATION, SUPPORT  
AND ADDITIONAL DOWNLOADS ON OUR WEBSITE:

**[fightbladdercancer.co.uk](https://www.fightbladdercancer.co.uk)**