

Facing a Diagnosis

A Guide to Support You Through Your First Steps and Connect You to Our Network of People Who Understand What You're Going Through

You're Not Alone

What you're feeling – shock, fear, anger, numbness – is normal. You do not have to face your diagnosis alone.

Fight CRC is patient-led, and our resources are written and reviewed by colorectal cancer experts and patients who have been where you are.

We are here for you in your fight against colorectal cancer.

HOPE NOTE

Let people help. A ride, a casserole, a text—small kindnesses add up.

JOIN THE COMMUNITY

Through our website or our app you can connect with patients, mentors, and a knowledgeable support system. Our Community of Champions app is a patient-focused space where you can ask questions, get tips, speak with Fight CRC staff, and find the support you need.

Scan to join our Community of Champions
community.fightcrc.org



Start With a Plan

WITHIN 48 HOURS OF YOUR DIAGNOSIS Request your records and imaging, ask when staging and biomarker/genetic testing results will be ready, and schedule a follow-up to review this information.

WITHIN 7 DAYS Schedule an appointment for a second opinion (you can always cancel if you don't need it), talk to your HR department about FMLA/leave, see a dentist if you can, and seek a referral to a fertility clinician (if relevant).

3 Questions to Ask

- 1 What are my next steps in the first month?
- 2 Have my tumor biomarkers and genetics been tested yet, and if not, when will they be?
- 3 Should I get a second opinion now?

"When I first got my diagnosis I felt like the world had stopped. I was angry, overwhelmed, and scared. What helped me the most was connecting with others who had also been through it. Hearing their stories didn't fully erase my fear, but it did give me hope."

Jeremy E.
 STAGE IV SURVIVOR

Ready to tell your story and offer your advice? fightcrc.org/story

Find a second opinion
fightcrc.org/provider



HOPE NOTE

You did a brave thing by opening this. One page at a time is enough.

NOTE It's ok to bring a friend, take notes, or ask for a pause to process information during appointments.

NOTE You aren't "starting over" with a second opinion—you're widening your circle of care.

REMINDER You don't have to learn everything today. Save this, breathe, and come back as you need.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NCCN Alignment Ask how your plan follows NCCN Guidelines for colon or rectal cancer. fightcrc.org/nccn

ChatCRC Ask about clinical trial options using your biomarker report or text ChatCRC at (318) 242-8272. chatbot.fightcrc.org

A Resource for Patients by Patients

What to Expect in the First Months

Everyone's treatment journey is unique, but this is what typically happens:

WEEKS 1–2

Imaging, labs, tumor biopsy Confirm tumor staging, order biomarker (tumor) testing and genetic (germline) testing, assemble your oncology team, and gather/transfer your medical records as necessary.

WEEKS 3–4

Possible referrals to genetic counseling, palliative care Port placement for systemic therapy (if necessary), radiation simulation for rectal tumors, finalization of your care plan – many begin treatment by the end of the first month.

MONTHS 2–6

Start treatment Manage side effects, re-scan about 2-3 weeks later (as necessary) to assess treatment response, and adjust treatment plan as needed.

RECORDS RELEASE SCRIPT FOR EMAIL (OR PORTAL)

"Please send my complete chart, pathology, and imaging to _____, My name is _____ and my date of birth is _____. This is needed by _____ for a second opinion. Thank you."

CLINIC B FAX/EMAIL
D.O.B.

NAME
DATE

IF YOU HAVE RECTAL CANCER

Ask about a pelvic MRI, whether short-course radiotherapy (SCRT) or long-course chemoradiation (LCRT) is right for you, and the recommended sequence (per NCCN guidelines). If surgery is discussed, ask your provider if you are eligible for a "watch-and-wait" approach to see if you respond to radiation and chemotherapy before surgery.

"Do I Have a Good Doctor?"

VETTING YOUR TEAM WITH THESE QUESTIONS:

- Which biomarkers will you test? (MMR/MSI, RAS (KRAS/NRAS), BRAF, HER2, NTRK)? All patients should have their biomarkers tested, but the specifics will depend on your tumor stage.
- Which treatment guidelines inform my care plan? (Follow NCCN guidelines for colon or rectal cancer).
- Do I qualify for any clinical trials, either now or later? Many patients view clinical trials as a "last resort," but this isn't always the case!
- **Practical considerations** Is your provider in-network, are you able to make appointments easily, is there a language barrier, and do you get along with your provider?
- **Second opinions are normal** Good clinicians welcome them, especially before making major decisions such as surgery, chemoradiation, or beginning systemic therapy.

SECOND-OPINION EMAIL TEMPLATE

When seeking a second opinion, consider following this email template when reaching out to a new clinician:

SUBJECT: Second opinion request for colorectal cancer

BODY: Hi, I was recently diagnosed with [colon/rectal] cancer, stage [if known], and I am seeking a second opinion for my treatment options. Please advise how to send records and your earliest appointment availability. Thank you, [Name, DOB, phone number]

Need help finding a second opinion? Use our free provider finder tool to find a physician near you with experience treating colorectal cancer. fightcrc.org/provider

LEARN MORE

NCCN Alignment Ask how your plan follows NCCN Guidelines for colon or rectal cancer. fightcrc.org/nccn

Fight CRC: Tests and Scans
fightcrc.org/scan/guide

Fight CRC: Biomarkers 101
fightcrc.org/biomarkers

Find a second opinion
fightcrc.org/provider

This brochure is educational and not medical advice. Talk with your care team about your specific situation.

Content medically reviewed by Julie Risk, RN, BSN.
FCRC-0012A-0126 · ©2026 FIGHTCRC · 703.548.1225 · [FIGHTCRC.ORG](https://fightcrc.org)

Tests, Scans & Staging

These results drive your treatment and trial options.

STAGING BASICS (TNM → STAGE 0–IV)

- **T (tumor)** - How deep the tumor goes into/through the bowel wall
- **N (nodes)** - If nearby lymph nodes are involved
- **M (metastasis)** - If cancer has spread to distant organs

TEST RESULTS YOU MAY SEE

Biopsy & pathology Cancer type and grade

Labs Blood counts; CEA (carcinoembryonic antigen)

Imaging CT/MRI/PET/Ultrasound as appropriate

Biomarker (tumor) testing MMR/MSI, KRAS/NRAS (RAS), BRAF, HER2, NTRK – may change drug choices (for example, anti-EGFR therapy requires RAS-wild-type) and trial eligibility

Genetic (germline) testing Checks inherited risk; guides your care and helps your family understand their risk: most CRC tumors are screened for MMR deficiency (MSI or IHC) as part of standard care

CONSIDER GENETIC COUNSELING IF ONE OR MORE OF THESE APPLY:

- ☐ You were diagnosed with CRC at age 50 or younger
- ☐ Your tumor has findings of MSI-H or d/MMR
- ☐ You have one or more close relatives with CRC or related cancers
- ☐ Have a known family genetic mutation or syndrome

Your Team & First Decisions

Your medical team may include: Your PCP, GI, colorectal surgeon, medical oncologist, radiation oncologist, navigator, pathologist, radiologist, and palliative care team.

PALLIATIVE CARE ≠ HOSPICE

Palliative care helps manage symptoms, stress, and side effects from diagnosis onward, while still treating the disease with intent to cure.

Your support system includes friends, family, and anyone willing to help. Lean on them for rides, meals, childcare, and any place you need support.

Consider a social worker for financial or legal help, as well as necessary work accommodations.

What Comes Next?

- **Consider clinical trials.** Talk to your care team about available options and eligibility.
- **Your mental health matters.** Address any anxiety or depression if experienced. It is common, and it is treatable. Don't suffer in silence.
- **Your lifestyle supports your recovery.** Prioritize sleep, stay active when possible, and eat balanced meals.

SIDE EFFECTS? KNOW WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

Fever > 101 once, or >100.4 for over an hour. Uncontrolled vomiting, chest pain, confusion, or heavy bleeding.

READY TO TAKE THE NEXT STEPS?

If you've read this brochure and are looking for more information, Fight CRC has you covered. Whether you're looking for in-depth info, ways to get involved, or want to know more about your clinical trial options or potential side effects, we are here for you. Visit fightcrc.org to get started.