

# Decisions

## Getting a Second Opinion

A second opinion is when another doctor gives his or her views about your condition and how it should be treated. A second opinion can help you decide whether surgery or other treatment is right for you at this time. You can ask your doctor, health plan or local medical society for help finding someone to give you a second opinion. Before scheduling an appointment, find out if your health plan covers second opinions.

## Researching Health Information

Looking for information to help you make the best decisions, but unsure where to begin? If you don't have access to the Internet at home, visit your local public library for a wealth of health information.

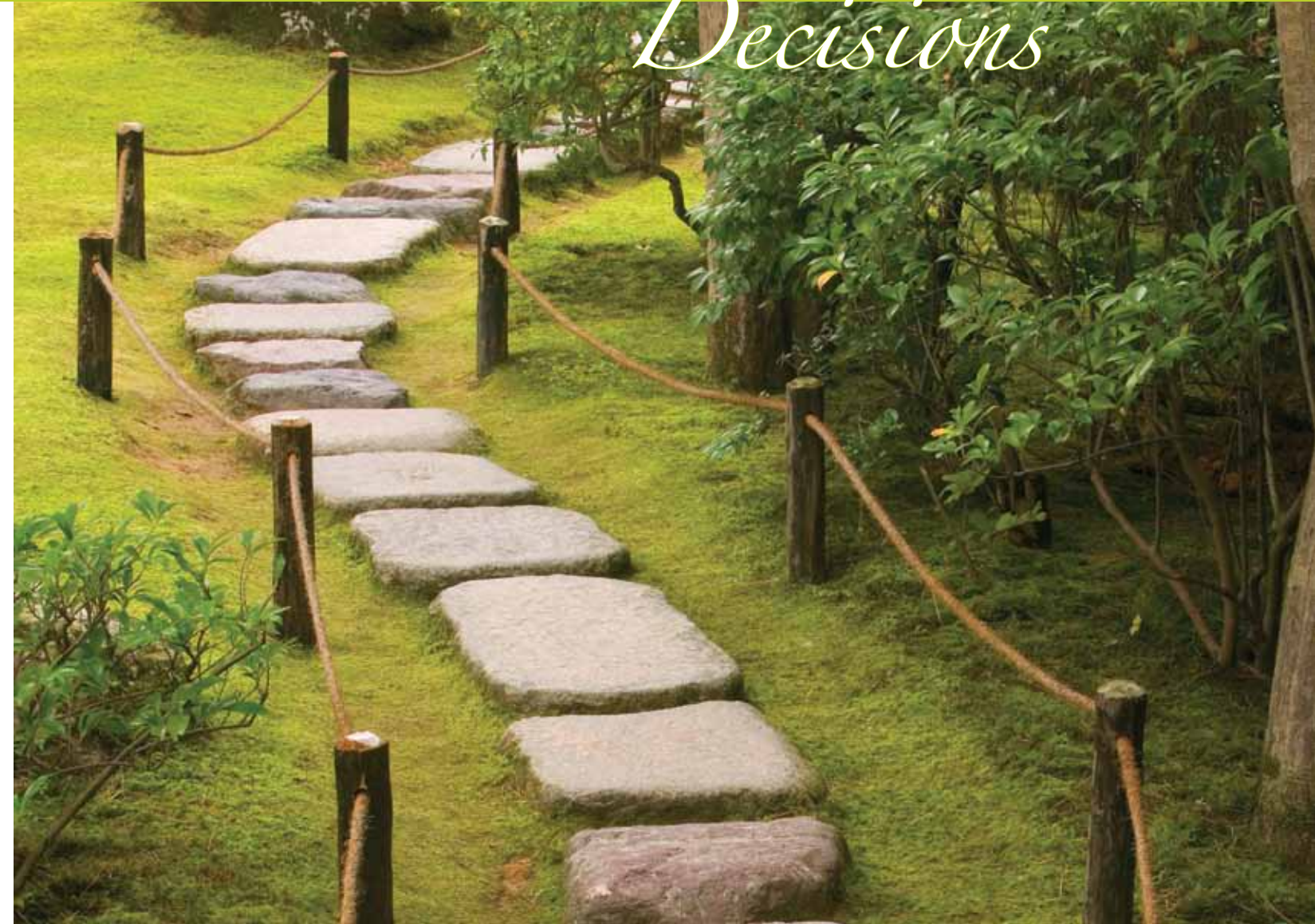
### *If you have access to the Internet, below are some tips:*

- Start with your health plan's Web site at [www.SouthCarolinaBlues.com](http://www.SouthCarolinaBlues.com).
- Visit the National Institutes of Health Web site ([www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)) or [www.healthfinder.gov](http://www.healthfinder.gov), both developed by the U.S. Department

of Health and Human Services. Another reliable site is [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov), developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

- Visit official Web sites of national health organizations, such as American Heart Association ([www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)), American Cancer Society ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)), American Diabetes Association ([www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)) or the American Lung Association ([www.americanlung.org](http://www.americanlung.org)).
- Keep in mind that many reliable sites end with .org (organization) or .gov (government).
- As a general rule, stick with sites developed by large, well-known companies, such as WebMD ([www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)).
- Be aware that chat rooms and blogs frequently contain false information.
- Confirm questionable information with at least one other source.

Researching aspects of your health can be powerful and informative. But always discuss findings and questions with your doctor. Ultimately, all decisions are yours to make. However, you should never begin a treatment plan without first speaking with a licensed physician.



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*P*atients who are actively involved in their own health care tend to get better results, according to research. As a patient, if you understand and feel comfortable with your treatment plan, you are more likely to do your part to make it work.



# Decisions

Information is available to help you make the best choices throughout the process — identifying a health problem, testing, diagnosis, treatment and conducting your own research.

## Choosing the Best Options

Research shows that millions of Americans receive treatments that are unnecessary, costly and even potentially harmful to their health. Other Americans may not receive health care treatments they need. Still others fail to explore their options before receiving treatment. This overuse, underuse and misuse of medical services is expensive to all of us. It sometimes occurs when patients make poor choices for themselves.

Since treatment costs and quality vary from one facility to the next, it is critical that you work closely with your doctor to identify the options that are best for you.

- Understand the consequences associated with each treatment option.
- Make sure the doctor knows your questions, concerns and preferences.
- Ask your doctor if the treatment he or she recommends is based on the latest scientific evidence.

## Identifying the Problem

The first step toward identifying the best remedy is to tell your doctor important information about your health. Be sure your doctor is informed of all medications you take, including prescriptions, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins and herbal remedies. Information about your current condition might include:

- A description of your symptoms and when they started.
- Are they better or worse at certain times of the day?
- What seems to make the symptoms better or worse?
- Do your symptoms affect eating, sleeping or other activities?

## Scheduling Medical Tests

Medical tests are an important way to help your doctor learn about the problem. Be sure any tests your doctor suggests are appropriate for you and aren't repetitive of tests you have already completed. Following the test, contact your doctor for the results if you do not hear from him or her after the results were expected.

Below are some questions to ask your doctor. The answers will help you understand why you need a particular test and how it might help you.

- What are the benefits and risks of having this test?
- How exactly is the test done?
- How should I prepare for the test to ensure the most accurate results?
- What kind of information will the test provide, and how accurate are the results?
- Is this test the only way to find out that information?
- How long will it take to get the results, and how will I get them?
- What's the next step after the test?

## Getting the Diagnosis

Before a treatment decision is made, your doctor needs to make a diagnosis. Often reaching a diagnosis can be difficult. Sometimes it can take a long time. And sometimes it is hard to find out exactly what is wrong.

When your doctor makes a diagnosis, ask him or her to fully explain your condition. Find out how it might affect you and your family.

**Below are some questions you may want to ask:**

- What is the diagnosis?
- What is the prognosis (outlook for the future)?
- Could someone else in my family develop the same condition?
- What self-care steps can I take to improve the outcome?
- Will I need special help at home for my condition? If so, what type of help?
- Does your office have materials I can take home?
- Where can I find more information?

## Understanding Treatment Options

After a diagnosis, the next step is for you and your doctor to look at your treatment options. Your doctor may recommend one or more of the following:

- Behavior changes (for example, eating a healthier diet, getting more exercise, quitting smoking and not drinking alcoholic beverages).
- Over-the-counter or prescription medicine.
- Surgery.
- Rehabilitation (such as physical therapy).



- Other treatments (for example, chiropractic services or massage therapy).
- “Watchful waiting,” which means you and your doctor will keep track of symptoms and watch for changes. If your condition gets worse, then treatment might be needed.

When choosing a treatment, make sure you understand your diagnosis and the urgency of treatment. Understand all your options and the cost of each treatment before it is scheduled. If you understand and feel comfortable with your treatment plan, you are more likely to do your part to make it work. Research shows that people who are actively involved in their own health care tend to get better results.

Clinical practice guidelines help doctors and patients seek the right treatment choices for some conditions. Some of these guidelines are based on scientific evidence about which treatments work for certain conditions and which do not. Ask your doctor if there are evidence-based guidelines on treatments for your condition.

All treatments have benefits and risks. To learn more about your options, you may want to ask your doctor:

- What treatment does he or she recommend? What are my other choices?
- What are the chances the recommended treatment will work?
- What are the expected results? How soon will I know the results?
- What are the risks, and what are the benefits?
- Are there any side effects? What can be done to reduce or avoid them?
- Is the treatment painful? How can the pain be controlled?
- What happens if I choose to have no treatment at all?
- How much does the treatment cost? Will my health plan pay for some of the costs? How much am I responsible for paying?

*explore your options*  
visit [SouthCarolinaBlues.com](http://SouthCarolinaBlues.com)