



Getting a Second Opinion

Fact:
Many diagnoses are dangerously wrong.

Fiction:
It's a myth that one's doctor always knows best.

Most people want to believe that their doctor knows best. But it can make sense to seek a second opinion when facing an illness or surgery—even if it seems uncomfortable at first.

Understanding Second Opinions

Second opinions can be very important, even life-saving. A recent review of cancer statistics at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions showed that among 6,171 patients referred to the facility for cancer treatment, 86 patients were given significantly wrong diagnoses.

If surgery or a specific cancer treatment is recommended, getting a second opinion can be important to health. There are two types of second opinions. Your doctor can refer you to another doctor, and forward your test results. It's good to ask why the second doctor was recommended, and how his or her qualifications relate to your condition. The second doctor can then say whether he agrees or disagrees with the first doctor, and why or why not.

In the second type, called a "blind" second opinion, the original doctor does not know about the referral. Repeat testing may be required.

Be sure to see if your health care plan will cover second opinions and duplicate tests.

People may seek second opinions:

- To obtain peace of mind that the first opinion is correct
- If they believe the first doctor is not taking their illness seriously or the treatment is not working
- Because the first doctor can't find what is wrong
- To learn about treatment options

Advantages of Second Opinions

Second opinions can help people:

- Avoid unnecessary surgeries
- Feel comfortable with their diagnosis
- Understand all of their options for care, including non-surgical options
- Take an active part in their medical care
- Potentially improve quality of life