

Spinecare Introduction

Getting a Second Opinion

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It is always a good idea to consider an additional opinion. This may entail a second opinion, a third (tertiary) opinion and in some cases more than that. This is particularly important if you have been diagnosed with a serious or chronic condition. It is equally important if aggressive or invasive treatment is being recommended increasing exposure to significant adverse side effects.

Obtaining a second opinion requires that you see two separate doctors for the same set of symptoms or condition. The doctors can be in the same or in different disciplines within the healthcare field. They may specialize in different areas. You are entitled to get an additional opinion at any stage of your spinecare. Your primary care physician or primary care spine specialist may want you to see one of his or her associates or a specialist to confirm a diagnosis or a particular treatment approach; this is known as a referral or recommended consultation. Some insurance companies require a second opinion before they will cover an extensive procedure. A second opinion is always a good idea if you have any reservations about a particular course of care.

Independent Second Opinion

Some physician partners in the same practice may be less inclined to provide a different opinion than that of their partner. Consider seeking an independent second opinion. This refers to getting an opinion from a physician who does not have a business relationship with your attending physician. To get an independent opinion, you will want to go to a physician who cannot be influenced by your primary attending physician.

General Guidelines for Seeking a Second Opinion

It is never a bad idea to get a second opinion unless it would result in a delay of care that could lead to further injury or bodily compromise. Just because you don't like the sound of your diagnosis doesn't mean you need to get a second opinion. Let's say your doctor suspects you have a disc herniation compressing a spinal nerve and your attending physician wants to perform a CT /myelogram requiring the injection of a contrast agent into the spine to confirm his or her suspicions. You might not like the sound of the procedure but more importantly you may be unwilling to expose yourself to the potential adverse side effects without getting another opinion.

The following guidelines are presented to help you decide whether an additional opinion is necessary or prudent. If the answer is yes to even one of the questions below, you should strongly consider a second opinion.

Is there a diagnosis? If your doctor cannot determine the cause or cannot provide a reasonable explanation for your symptoms you have a right to go elsewhere.

Is the diagnosis uncertain? If your doctor does not seem confident about your diagnosis and is not taking additional steps to pursue the cause of your condition consider another opinion.

Ask your doctor if you should get another opinion? Ask your doctor if he or she believes you should seek a second opinion. If your doctor is challenged by your condition or by a poor response to care he or she will probably be quick to recommend another opinion. This is a sure sign that you should follow through.

Is the diagnosis life-threatening? If you are given a life threatening diagnosis it is reasonable to obtain a second or third opinion to determine whether the life changing diagnosis is accurate and to review all reasonable therapeutic options that might prolong life or simply improve quality of life. Obtain a confirming diagnosis might help you better cope with your illness and come to terms with the diagnosis.

Is the treatment controversial, experimental, or risky? You might not question the diagnosis, but you might feel uncomfortable with the recommended treatment plan. The plan may not sound reasonable or you may simply want to find out if there are other treatment approaches available that might be associated with less risk or better outcome. For example, if you are not comfortable with a recommendation for spine surgery, perhaps another doctor will recommend a different approach, such as chiropractic care, a series of injections or an anti-inflammatory approach.