

A practical guide to living with and after cancer

**WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

CANCER AND OLDER PEOPLE



About this leaflet

This leaflet may be useful if you are an older person and have questions or concerns about cancer. It is aimed at people aged 70 and over, but people under the age of 70 might also find it useful. It has been written with help from Age UK.

This leaflet looks at:

- what you should expect from your treatment and care
- different types of support available, including help with finances
- information about living with cancer and other conditions
- support for carers who are diagnosed with cancer.

If you find this leaflet useful, you could pass it on to your family and friends. They may also want information to help them support you.

We have included quotes from people affected by cancer, which you might find helpful. They are from people who have chosen to share their story with us.

We have also listed some other useful organisations at the end of this leaflet (see pages 20 to 21).

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Older people and cancer

As an older person, you may have particular questions or concerns about cancer. For example:

- If you are having health problems, you may be worried that you might have cancer. We have more information in our leaflet **Signs and symptoms of cancer** which you might find helpful. To order a copy, call **0808 808 00 00** or visit **be.macmillan.org.uk**
- If you are diagnosed with cancer and already have another health condition, you may want more information about how it might affect your symptoms or treatment (see pages 13 to 14).
- If you have cancer, you might be worried that your age will affect which treatments are available to you (see page 5).
- If you look after someone with an illness or disability and you have been diagnosed with cancer, you may want to know how to manage your caring responsibilities while dealing with cancer or treatment (see page 19).

Being diagnosed with cancer at any age can feel overwhelming and cause different emotions. It is important to remember that treatments for cancer are improving all the time. Many people with cancer are cured. Others are able to have an active life while living with cancer.

You might find that you need help with practical issues, your finances, or making decisions about treatment.

We have lots of information about cancer for people of all ages, including the different types of support available. Call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm or visit **macmillan.org.uk** to find out more.



Making decisions about treatment

Cancer treatments

Your age should not stop you from being offered many of the available treatments for cancer. If your cancer doctor does not recommend a particular treatment, it should be because the treatment is unlikely to be helpful and not because of your age.

The aim of cancer treatment may be to cure the cancer. Or it may be to control the cancer and relieve your symptoms.

Treatments can include:

- surgery
- radiotherapy
- chemotherapy
- hormonal therapy
- targeted (biological) therapy.

Accessing cancer information

Some people may need information in a different format. The back of this leaflet tells you more about how to access Macmillan information in different formats.

If your eyesight is poor, Macmillan and many other organisations produce information in large print. We can also produce Braille versions of our information on request. Some of our information is available as audiobooks.

If you have hearing difficulties or are deaf, some of the videos on our website have British Sign Language translation. We also have information in other languages.

You can call our support line on **0808 808 00 00** to ask about different formats.

Your rights as an older person

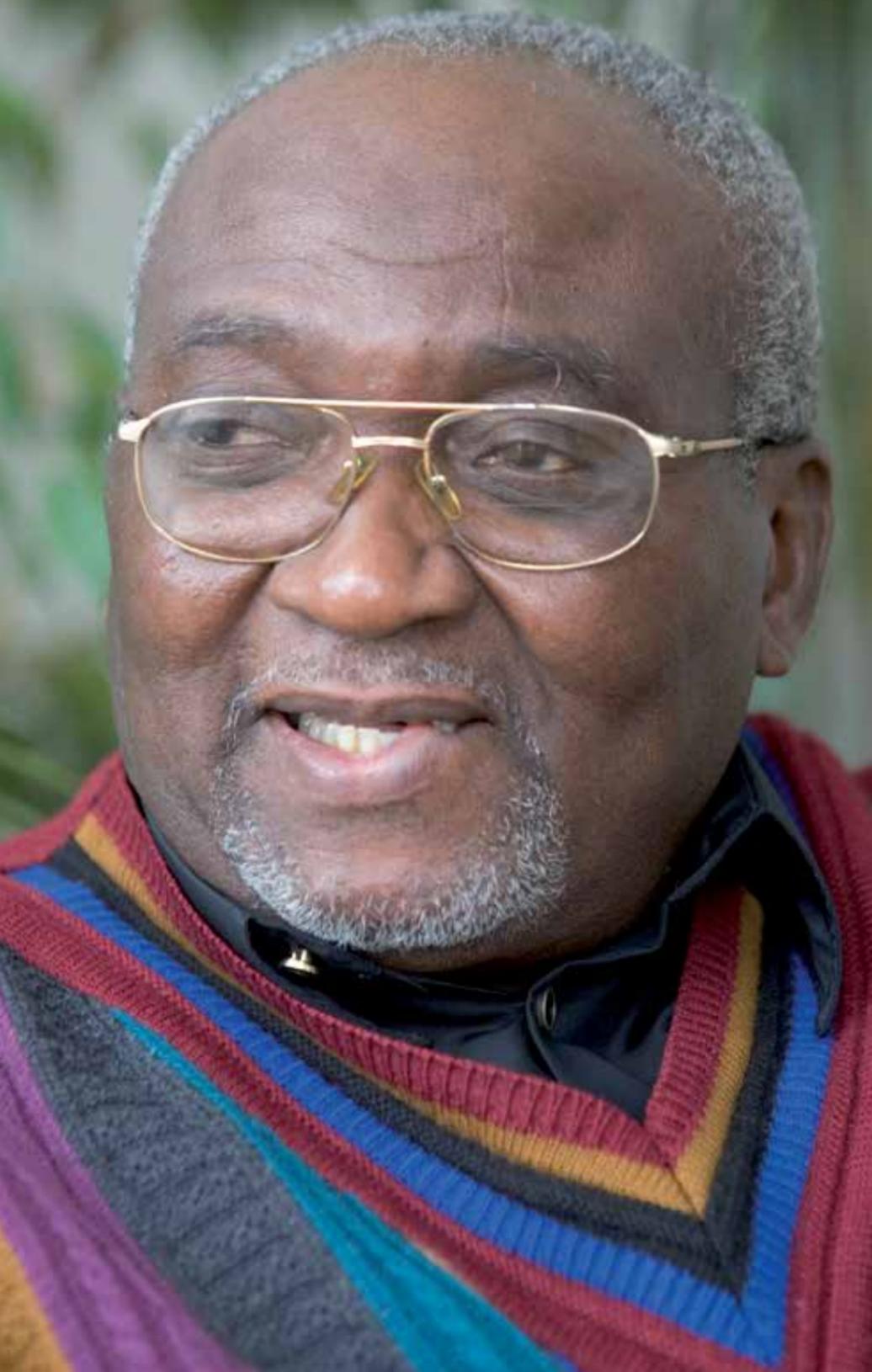
Like all patients, you have the right to:

- be treated with dignity and respect
- see your medical records (this can take up to 40 days and may involve a fee)
- be given information about any proposed treatment, including its aims and side effects
- expect confidentiality
- ask for a second opinion
- refuse treatment
- make a complaint.

Your data and the cancer registry

When you are diagnosed with cancer in the UK, some information about you and your health is collected in a registry. This is used to plan and improve health and care services. Your hospital will usually give this information to the registry automatically. There are strict rules to make sure the information is kept safely and securely. It will only be used for your direct care or for health and social care planning and research.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions. If you do not want your information included in the registry, you can contact the cancer registry in your country to opt out. You can find more information at [macmillan.org.uk/cancerregistry](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancerregistry)



Access to treatment

Your age should not stop you being offered treatments for cancer if:

- they are suitable for you
- they are suitable for the type of cancer you have.

Research funded by Macmillan suggests that:

- the outcomes of cancer treatment for older people are similar to the outcomes for younger people
- older people who are relatively fit can safely have certain cancer treatments.

Some types of treatment are effective in younger people but are not suitable for some older people. This includes certain chemotherapy drugs. The side effects of some treatments may be worse if you have other health problems (see pages 13 to 14) and are taking other medicines (see page 15).

Having some health conditions might mean that certain types of treatment are not suitable for you. These conditions include lung or kidney disease.

Your cancer doctor might not recommend a particular treatment. This may be because:

- it is unlikely to be helpful
- they believe the side effects will be too severe.

Your cancer doctor should explain the range of treatments that are available. They should also talk to you about why particular treatments may not be effective or right for you.

You can ask your doctor how other conditions you have can be managed during any cancer treatment they suggest.

You may be invited to take part in a clinical trial.

We have more information about clinical trials in our booklet **Understanding cancer research trials (clinical trials)** and on our website.



Your finances

Having cancer can cause extra expenses. For example, you might have to pay for phone calls, transport to and from the hospital, and car parking. If you are struggling to cope with extra costs, you may be able to get help. Our booklet **Help with the cost of cancer** has more detailed information. To order a copy, call **0808 808 00 00** or visit **be.macmillan.org.uk**

Sorting out your financial affairs may also help to give you peace of mind. Planning ahead could include:

- writing a will
- putting funeral plans in place
- sorting out what will happen to your possessions (your estate).

'Marnie at Macmillan was wonderful. She came and checked in on me and helped me with all sorts of things, like transport to my radiotherapy. She got me £280 towards taxis, which was one less thing to worry about.'

Dorothy

Some charities offer a free will-writing service, which you may find useful. Or you can speak to an independent solicitor.

Talk to your family and friends about the type of funeral you would like. This means that your funeral is more likely to reflect your wishes.

You may find our booklet **Sorting out your affairs** helpful. We can send you a free copy.

You can call the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00** for more information about sorting out your financial affairs.

Cancer and other health conditions

Older people with cancer are more likely to also have another health condition. We have information to help you cope with cancer if you are also living with another medical condition.

Cancer and dementia

The number of people in the UK living with both cancer and dementia is growing.

We have information about living with cancer and dementia in our booklet **A guide for people with cancer and dementia**.

We also have information for people who look after someone with dementia and cancer in our booklet **Cancer and dementia: a guide for carers**.

Our information includes:

- worries you may have about cancer and dementia
- ways to cope with cancer and dementia
- how to get help and support.

Cancer and diabetes

If you have diabetes, cancer treatment can make it difficult to control your blood sugar level.

We have information about diabetes and cancer in our booklet **Diabetes and cancer treatment**.

Our information includes:

- tips to help you cope with treatment side effects
- managing your diabetes if you have advanced cancer.

Cancer and heart health

Some cancer treatments can affect how the heart works. Some older people may already have a heart condition, or be at a higher risk of heart problems.

We have information about different cancer treatments that may have an effect on your heart in our booklet **Heart health and cancer treatment**.

Our information includes:

- tips about what you can do to help prevent and manage heart problems during cancer treatment.

To order a free copy of any of our booklets, call us on **0808 808 00 00** or visit **be.macmillan.org.uk**

Taking medicines

Many people need to take more medicines as they get older. You may find it difficult to remember what you have taken. Or you may be worried about the best way to take several medicines at the same time. Your GP, cancer doctor or local pharmacist can give you advice about taking your medicines.

Some cancer medicines are only available from the hospital. Your GP, cancer doctor or the pharmacist at the hospital can talk to you about where to get your medicines.

There are different things you can do to help remind you about your medicines:

- You could make a chart of your daily medicines and tick them off as you take them.
- You may find it helpful to use a daily dosing medicines box, such as a dosette box.

Care towards the end of life

You might reach a stage where there are no more treatments available to cure the cancer. It can be very difficult to hear that you may be reaching the end of your life.

You can talk to your healthcare team, family or carer about how you would like to be cared for towards the end of your life. Together, you can make a plan for your care.

Our booklets **Coping with advanced cancer** and **End of life: a guide** have more information you may find helpful. To order these booklets, call us on **0808 808 00 00** or visit **[be.macmillan.org.uk](https://www.be.macmillan.org.uk)**

'His nurse helped us to know what to do: she supported my husband to make positive choices, including decisions about his end of life. He was able to spend most of his last seven months at home in the peace and quiet of the countryside.'

Antonia

Palliative care

Palliative care is treatment that aims to reduce symptoms, such as pain or tiredness. It can also give emotional, social and spiritual support to you and your family. Palliative care does not aim to cure the cancer, but it can help to give you the best possible quality of life.

Your cancer doctor might refer you to a specialist palliative care team or specialist palliative care nurse. They may also refer you to another professional, such as a physiotherapist.

You might receive care in a hospice or a palliative care unit in a hospital. Palliative care nurses may also visit you in your own home. If you are at home, you may receive some palliative care and support from a district or community nurse.

Residential care

You might go into a hospice for a short stay to help control your symptoms. Or you might choose to move into a hospice for the final days of your life. You can find out more about your local hospice from your doctor, district nurse or palliative care nurse. Hospice UK also has useful information about hospices and where they are located across the UK (see page 21).

Or you or your family may think you would benefit by staying in a care home. You can get information about finding residential care and nursing homes on the NHS Choices website **nhs.uk**



If you are a carer with cancer

Many older people are looking after a partner, relative or friend who is disabled or ill. If you are a carer and also have cancer, you may feel overwhelmed. You will need time to think about whether you can care for someone while you are ill and possibly having treatment.

Having cancer treatment could affect your ability to care for someone else. Your doctor will tell you when your treatment can start and how long it might take. They will also talk to you about any possible side effects. This information can help you decide whether you can continue being a carer, or whether you will need to make other arrangements. The effect on your role as a carer might be temporary or longer-term.

Support for each other

No one knows more about the impact cancer has on a person's life than people who have been affected by cancer themselves.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or visit **[macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)** to find out about support groups near you. These are groups of people affected by cancer who meet in your area to support each other.

You can also share your experiences, ask questions and get support from others on our Online Community. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)**

Further information and support

Cancer is the toughest fight most of us will ever face. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

Age UK

Tel (England and Wales)
0800 055 6112

Tel (Scotland)
0800 12 44 222

Tel (Northern Ireland)
0808 808 7575

www.ageuk.org.uk

Provides a wide range of services to help people in later life throughout the UK. The Age UK network includes Age Scotland, Age Cymru and Age NI and more than 150 local Age UKs throughout England.

Carers Trust

Tel (England)
0300 772 9600

Tel (Scotland)
0300 123 2008

Tel (Wales)
0292 009 0087

Email info@carers.org

www.carers.org

Works to improve support, services and recognition for anyone living with the challenges of caring.

Citizen's Advice

Provides advice on a variety of issues including financial, legal, housing and employment issues. Use their online webchat or find details for your local office in the phone book or on one of these websites:

England

Helpline 03444 111 444
www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Wales

Helpline 03444 77 2020
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales

Scotland

Helpline 0808 800 9060
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland

Northern Ireland

Helpline 0800 028 1181
www.citizensadvice.co.uk

Disabled Living Foundation

Tel 0300 999 0004
(Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm)

Email info@dlf.org.uk
www.dlf.org.uk

Provides advice about all types of disability equipment and mobility products.

Hospice UK

Tel 020 7520 8200

Email

info@hospiceuk.org

www.hospiceuk.org

Provides information about living with advanced illness. Has a directory of hospice services in the UK and free booklets.

Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. Some photos are of models.

Thanks

This leaflet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by our Chief Medical Editor, Dr Timothy Iveson, Macmillan Consultant Medical Oncologist.

With thanks to: Charlotte Argyle, Macmillan Carers Support Programme Manager; Adrienne Betteley, Macmillan End of Life Care Specialist Advisor; Cheuk-kie Jackie Cheung, Specialist Cancer Pharmacist; Sheelagh Donovan, Technical Support Advice Officer: Health and End of Life, Age UK; and Margot Gosney, Professor of Elderly Care Medicine.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and to those who shared their stories.

We welcome feedback on our information. If you have any, please contact us at cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk

Sources

If you would like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk

This leaflet is for older people living with cancer. It is aimed at people aged 70 and over, but people under the age of 70 might also find it useful. It has been written with help from Age UK.

It explains the different types of treatment and support available. It also has information about living with cancer and other conditions.

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

Would you prefer to speak to us in another language? Interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use. Are you deaf or hard of hearing? Call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call our support line.

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Next planned review 2020. Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Printed using sustainable material. Please recycle.



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