

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT

HEALTHY EATING AND CANCER



About this booklet

Many people want to make positive changes to their lives when they have been diagnosed with cancer. Taking steps to live a healthier lifestyle is often a major part of these changes.

This booklet is for people living with cancer or after cancer treatment who want to know more about a healthy diet. It explains why diet is important and has tips on how to eat well and keep to a healthy weight. It also answers some common questions about diet and cancer.

This booklet is part of a series of booklets on diet and cancer. The other booklets in the series are **Recipes for people affected by cancer**, **Eating problems and cancer** and **The building-up diet**. Check with your cancer doctor, nurse or dietitian that this is the right booklet for you, and whether you need any additional information.

We have included quotes from people who have had cancer and diet problems. Some are from our online community (macmillan.org.uk/community) and healthtalk.org. Others are from people who have shared their experiences with us. To share your experience, visit macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory

How to use this booklet

You don't have to read the booklet from start to finish. You can use the contents list on page 3 to help you. At the end of this booklet there are some useful organisations and websites (see pages 57 to 60). On page 61, there is space for you to write down questions for your doctor, nurse or dietitian.

For more information

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

If you would prefer to speak to us in another language, interpreters are available. Please tell us, in English, the language you want to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call **0808 808 00 00**.

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 cancer 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**

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Diet and cancer

Healthier diets could help prevent 1 in 10 cancers (10%) in the UK. A lot of research is being done into which types of food may affect our risk of developing cancer.

Research shows that being overweight increases the risk of developing some types of cancer. There are many reasons why people are overweight, but an unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity are often factors.

Some foods we eat may increase our risk of cancer, but others may protect us. How our diet affects the risk of developing cancer is complicated, and we still do not completely understand it. Research suggests that eating fruit and vegetables may reduce the risk of certain cancers.

What we do know is that a healthy, balanced diet and regular exercise helps us keep to a healthy weight. This can help reduce the risk of developing some cancers.

Why is a healthy diet important?

Food has nutrients that our bodies need. The main groups of nutrients are carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals, fats, fibre and fluids. A healthy, balanced diet gives you all the nutrients you need to keep your body working well. For most people, this includes:

- lots of fruit and vegetables (at least five portions a day)
- plenty of starchy foods (carbohydrates), such as wholemeal bread, rice, pasta, noodles, couscous and potatoes
- some protein-rich foods, such as meat, poultry, fish, nuts, eggs and pulses (beans and lentils)
- some milk and dairy foods, such as cheese and yoghurt
- a small amount of food high in fat, salt and sugar.

Drinks should be mainly water or tea and coffee (without sugar). If you drink fizzy drinks or squashes, try to reduce the amount you drink and have the sugar-free types instead. Try to limit the amount of fruit juice you drink as well.

Try to reduce the amount of processed and red meats and other high-calorie foods you eat, such as fast foods.

Having a healthy, balanced diet is one of the best choices you can make for your overall health. This includes thinking about what and how much you drink too. Many people find making the decision to follow a healthy, balanced diet helps give them back a sense of control. It can also help you feel that you are doing the best for your health.

Eating well and keeping to a healthy weight will help you keep up your strength, increase your energy levels and improve your sense of wellbeing. It can also help reduce the risk of new cancers and other diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes or having a stroke.

After cancer treatment, some people have a higher risk of other health problems, including diabetes, heart disease or osteoporosis (bone thinning). If you have been told that you may be at an increased risk of any of these conditions, it is especially important to follow a healthy diet to help prevent them.

'When I got the diagnosis, it made me take a look at myself. I realised how important exercise and diet are to things like cancer. It made me realise it was time to make a major change.'

David

Know your food types

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. They are also usually low in fat. Most of us do not eat enough fruit and vegetables. You need to aim to eat at least five portions a day. Different types and colours of fruits and vegetables contain different nutrients. Try to have a wide variety of fruits and vegetables from each of the colour groups: green, yellow, red, purple, orange and white.

People who have a diet high in fruit and vegetables may have a lower risk of heart disease. It may also reduce the risk of developing some types of cancer, such as cancers of the mouth, throat and lung.



Fruit and vegetables should make up about a third of the food we eat every day.

The following each count as one portion:

- one apple or one banana
- a slice of melon
- two small fruits, such as kiwi fruits or plums
- a handful of berries (strawberries, blackberries or blueberries)
- a small can of tinned pineapple or a few slices of fresh pineapple
- a glass of orange or apple juice (this only counts once a day)
- one whole vegetable, for example a courgette or a small pepper
- three heaped tablespoons of diced carrots or shredded cabbage
- a cereal bowl of mixed salad
- seven cherry tomatoes
- two broccoli florets
- three heaped tablespoons of peas or lentils.

Tips for eating more fruit and vegetables:

- Have a mixed salad as a starter or as a side dish with your main meal.
- Reduce meat portions and replace with larger servings of vegetables and salad.
- If you need a snack between meals, choose fresh fruit.
- Frozen vegetables and tinned fruit in juice (not syrup) are just as healthy as fresh ones and can be cheaper.
- Eat fruit and vegetables cooked in dishes such as soups, stews and pasta.
- Try to avoid adding butter, rich sauces or dressings to your vegetables and salads. This will increase the calories you eat and drink. But you can include them if you are trying to gain weight.

Starchy foods (carbohydrates)

Starchy foods (carbohydrates) are an important part of a healthy diet. They are a good source of energy and contain nutrients, including fibre, calcium, iron and B vitamins.

Starchy foods are broken down in the body to become glucose (a type of sugar needed for energy), which gives us energy. Energy is measured in calories. We all need a certain number of calories each day for energy, even if we are not being very active. For example, we need energy to breathe when just sitting in a chair.

The amount of energy a person needs each day varies. It depends on how quickly their body uses the energy, and on their level of activity. An adult man needs about 2,500 calories a day and an adult woman needs about 2,000 calories. If we have too many calories, we put on weight. If we do not have enough, we use up our body's energy stores and lose weight.

Foods such as bread, breakfast cereal, rice and pasta are starchy foods. Wholegrain or wholemeal starchy foods are better if you are trying to lose weight, as they make you feel fuller for longer. When eating starchy foods, try to choose wholegrain or wholemeal bread, rice and pasta.

Potatoes are also a type of carbohydrate. Boiled or baked potatoes are healthier than deep-fried chips. If you want to eat chips, use the low-fat, oven varieties.

Starchy food should make up about one third of what you eat in a day.

Fibre (roughage)

The main role of fibre is to keep the digestive system and bowels healthy and prevent constipation. Fibre is the part of cereals, fruits and vegetables that is not digested and passes down into the gut.

Many studies show that foods high in fibre may reduce the risk of bowel cancer. Most people do not eat enough foods that are high in fibre. Starchy food can be a good source of fibre. Increasing the amount of fibre in your diet can help you feel fuller more quickly, so you are less likely to eat too much.

Try to eat more:

- wholemeal, seeded or granary breads, and wholemeal chapatis and pittas
- wholegrain (high-fibre) cereals and pasta
- brown rice
- yams and potatoes with their skins on
- peas, beans, lentils, grains, oats and seeds
- fruit and vegetables.

The fibre in foods such as oats, beans and lentils may help reduce the amount of cholesterol in the blood.

Sugar

Sugar is a good source of energy and is found naturally in some food and drinks, such as fruit and milk. The body also gets glucose by breaking down carbohydrates.

Processed sugar is usually not recommended. This is found in sweets, biscuits, cakes, pastries and puddings. It can also be added to tea or coffee.

Fizzy drinks and alcohol often contain a lot of sugar too. Try to avoid food and drinks with added sugar.

It is better to get energy from natural sugar found in foods such as nuts, whole fruits (not just fruit juice) and wholemeal breads. When these sugars are broken down, they are released more slowly. This helps to keep your energy levels more even.

If you find it hard to reduce your sugar intake, a sugar substitute might help in the short term. But this will not reduce your craving for sugar, so it is not a long-term solution.



Tips for eating less sugar:

- Drink water, lower-fat milks or sugar-free, diet and no-added-sugar drinks, instead of sugary fizzy drinks or squash.
- If you prefer fizzy drinks, try diluting fruit juice with sparkling water.
- If you add sugar to hot drinks or breakfast cereal, gradually reduce the amount until you can cut it out altogether.
- Try a lower-fat spread, sliced banana or lower-fat cream cheese instead of jam or marmalade on toast.
- Try halving the sugar you use in your recipes. This works for most things except jam, meringues and ice-cream.
- Choose tins of fruit in juice rather than syrup.
- Choose wholemeal breakfast cereal rather than those that are sugar-coated or high in sugar.

Fats

Having some fat in our diet helps us to absorb vitamins A, D, E and K. Foods that are high in fat are also high in energy (calories). This means eating a lot of fat can make you more likely to put on weight and develop other health problems.

There are two types of fat:

- **Saturated fats** are found mainly in fatty cuts of meat, sausages, pies, butter, ghee, cheese, cakes and biscuits.
- **Unsaturated fats** are found mainly in vegetable-based cooking oils and spreads, nuts, seeds and oily fish, such as sardines and mackerel. Unsaturated fats are still high-energy (high-calorie) foods.

Generally, it is important to try to eat less fat, and to choose foods that contain unsaturated fats instead of saturated. Even foods labelled as 'low-fat' can still be high in calories. However, if you are trying to gain weight, you may need to have more fat in your diet.

Saturated fats

Saturated fat can raise cholesterol levels in the blood and increase the risk of heart disease. Foods high in saturated fat include cheese, butter, ghee, burgers, sausages, samosas, biscuits, pastries, cakes and chocolate.

The current advice is for men to eat no more than 30g and women no more than 20g of saturated fat a day. You can use the nutrition labels on foods as a guide. High-fat foods contain more than 20g of fat per 100g. Low-fat foods contain less than 3g of fat per 100g.

Unsaturated fats

Unsaturated fat helps reduce cholesterol levels in the blood. There are monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.

Monounsaturated fats can help protect our hearts. They are found in:

- olive oil and spreads, and rapeseed oil and spreads
- avocados
- some nuts, such as almonds, brazil nuts and peanuts.

Polyunsaturated fats can help lower cholesterol. They include omega-3 fatty acids, which are found in oily fish like mackerel, salmon, trout and sardines.

Several research studies have shown that eating one to two servings of oily fish a week reduces the risk of developing heart disease. However, too much oily fish may not be good for you. The UK Food Standards Agency recommends that children, and women who may become pregnant, eat up to two portions a week. They recommend that women past childbearing age and men do not eat more than four portions a week.

Other good sources of unsaturated fat include nuts and seeds, and sunflower, olive and vegetable oil.

Tips for eating less fat:

- Eat more skinless fish and chicken, rather than red meat.
- Choose lean cuts of meat and trim off all the fat you can.
- Eat less fried food – bake, grill, steam or poach food instead.
- Choose lower-fat dairy products when you can.
- When you are shopping, check the labels for unsaturated and saturated fat, and choose lower-fat options.
- Put more vegetables and beans, and a bit less meat, in stews and curries.
- Try more vegetarian recipes.
- Cut out or reduce the number of fatty takeaways you eat, such as burgers, curries and kebabs.
- Avoid snacks that are high in fat, such as pastries, crisps and biscuits.

Salt

Too much salt in your diet can lead to high blood pressure, which can cause heart disease and strokes. A diet that is high in salt can also increase the risk of developing stomach cancer.

Try to have no more than 6g of salt (a teaspoonful) a day. It is not just the salt you add to your food that counts. Many cured or processed meats (such as sausages, cured ham or bacon), tinned foods and ready meals contain high levels of salt, so always check the label.

You can find out how much salt is in processed foods by checking the labels. If there is more than 1.5g of salt per 100g, the food is high in salt. Low-salt foods contain 0.3g or less of salt per 100g.

Tips for eating less salt:

- When you are buying bread, cereal and ready meals, compare the amount of salt in different types and choose the ones with the lower amounts. Frozen meals tend to have less salt than chilled ones.
- When you are buying tinned vegetables and tuna, choose the types in spring water rather than salted water or brine.
- Try not to add salt to your food.
- Add herbs, spices or black pepper to pasta dishes, vegetables and meat instead of salt.
- Marinate meat and fish before cooking to give them more flavour.

Protein

Your body needs protein to perform a wide range of functions, such as building and repairing muscles and other body tissues. We need extra protein (as well as extra energy) when we are ill, injured or stressed, to repair any damage.

Protein-rich foods can also be a good source of vitamins and minerals. Protein is found in red meat, poultry (such as chicken and turkey), fish, milk, dairy foods, eggs and pulses (such as peas, beans and lentils). It can also be found in soya, tofu and mycoprotein (Quorn™), which can replace mince, burgers and sausages as a source of protein.

Meat

Several studies suggest that eating lots of red and processed meat can increase the risk of developing bowel cancer and possibly stomach and prostate cancer. Red meat is beef, pork, lamb and veal. Processed meats include sausages, bacon, salami, tinned meats and packet meats like sandwich ham. Eating meat that is cooked at high temperatures, such as fried or barbecued meat, may also increase the risk of developing some cancers.

The greatest risk seems to be for people who eat two or more portions of red or processed meat a day. People who eat less than two portions a week seem to have the lowest risk. No link has been found between eating poultry, such as turkey and chicken, and the risk of developing cancer.

Tips for eating less red and processed meat:

- Cut down on meat generally – especially red and processed meat, such as sausages, burgers, pies and sausage rolls, which are high in saturated fat.
- Try to reduce your meat portions and have more vegetables instead.
- A portion of meat should be about the size of a packet of playing cards.
- Choose leaner cuts of meat that have less fat, such as those labelled 'lean' or 'extra lean'. You can also look at the labels to see which cuts have the least fat. Or ask a butcher or grocer if you are not sure.
- Try to eat more fish, chicken, turkey, beans and lentils instead.
- Skinned turkey or chicken is a lower-fat alternative to red meat such as lamb, beef or pork.
- Grill or roast your meat instead of frying it to reduce the number of calories.



Fish

Fish is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals. It is often low in saturated fat (see page 15). Aim to have at least two portions of fish a week. Grilling, steaming, poaching or baking fish is healthier than frying it. Tinned fish such as tuna, sardines and pilchards are also low in saturated fat. Frozen fish can be cheaper than fresh fish, but avoid high-fat, processed meals with fish in them, or fish in batter.

Milk and dairy foods

Milk and dairy products are good sources of protein, vitamins and calcium, but they can also be high in fat. High-fat milk and dairy products can be good to include as part of a building-up diet for weight loss. But to maintain a healthy weight or lose weight, try semi-skimmed or skimmed milk and low-fat yoghurt, and have only small amounts of cheese.

Other sources of protein

Other sources of protein include pulses (peas, beans and lentils) and nuts. Pulses can be the base of lots of meals. Nuts can be used in both sweet and savoury dishes and are high in energy. They contain good amounts of protein and some of the healthier unsaturated fats. Nuts are a good source of protein for vegetarians and vegans.

Some vegetarians include eggs and dairy products, like cheese, as sources of protein in their diet. Eggs are a good source of protein, but hard cheese can be high in unhealthy saturated fats, and should be eaten in small amounts. Vegan cheese made from soya can be a healthier alternative to dairy cheese. Soya is also available as soya mince, soya burgers and sausages, soya milk and tofu. Mycoprotein (Quorn) can also replace mince, burgers and sausages as a source of protein.

There have been some concerns about soya and its effect on breast cancer. There is currently no evidence to suggest that a moderate amount of soya has any harmful effect on breast cancer. Recommendations say it is safe to have one to two servings a day of whole soya foods. Whole soya foods are unprocessed soya foods, for example miso, tempeh, tofu, soya beans (edamame), soya nuts and soya milk. One serving is equal to a large glass of soya milk, 50g of tofu, 100g of soya mince or 28g of soya nuts or edamame beans. If you are worried about soya, talk to your doctor, dietitian or cancer nurse specialist.

Vitamins and minerals

The body needs minerals for various functions, such as maintaining healthy nerves, bones and teeth. Vitamins are essential to help our bodies work normally, but we only need tiny amounts of them. If you are eating even a small amount of the main food types that contain vitamins, you are probably getting enough vitamins. But if you are not able to eat well for a long period of time, you may need multivitamins and mineral supplements. Your doctor, dietitian or pharmacist can give you more advice about these.

Fluids

Our bodies need a certain amount of fluid each day to work properly. It may be difficult to drink enough liquid when you don't feel well. Women should try to drink roughly 8 glasses (about 1.6 litres) of fluid a day, and men should try to drink about 10 glasses (about 2 litres) a day.

Water is the best for hydration, but it contains no extra nutrients such as energy or vitamins. Milk, smoothies and not-from-concentrate or freshly-squeezed fruit juices contain a lot of energy and nutrients, so they may be good choices if you are struggling to eat well. Soft and fizzy drinks that contain a lot of sugar are high in energy, but they do not contain any other nutrients. The sugar and acidity may also harm your teeth.

Drinks that contain caffeine include coffee, tea and some fizzy drinks. These can make you need to wee more often. You can include them as part of your normal fluid intake. But make sure that you drink other fluids that do not contain caffeine as well.

Food labels

Most packaged foods have information labels to help you make healthier choices at the supermarket. They give information about the levels of fat, salt, added sugar, calories, and sometimes sodium and fibre.

Many food manufacturers and supermarkets use a traffic light system on their labels. The label tells you the amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt per 100g (3½oz) of the product.

The colours show if the amounts are high, medium or low:

- **Red** – the level is high.
- **Amber** – the level is medium.
- **Green** – the level is low.

You should eat more foods with amber and green labels and fewer with red. You can use the table below to check products that do not have traffic light labelling, by comparing it with their ingredients list. We have included this table as a card in the front of this booklet. You can take it out and use it while food shopping.

	Sugars	Fats	Saturates	Salt
High (per 100g)	Over 15g	Over 20g	Over 5g	Over 1.5g
Medium (per 100g)	5g to 15g	3g to 20g	1.5g to 5g	0.3g to 1.5g
Low (per 100g)	Under 5g	Under 3g	Under 1.5g	Under 0.3g

What makes up a healthy, balanced diet?

This diagram shows the proportion of each type of food you should try to eat for a healthy, balanced diet. Aim to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables and starchy foods. The proportion of protein you eat should be smaller. The amount of dairy you have should be smaller still. You should aim to have only a small amount of oils and spreads.



Alcohol

Alcohol is high in calories and can lead to weight gain. It is also linked with an increased risk of some cancers. Following recommended drinking guidelines is good for your health and your weight.




NHS guidelines suggest that both men and women should:

- not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol in a week
- spread the alcohol units they drink in a week over three or more days
- try to have several alcohol-free days every week.

A unit of alcohol is half a pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider, one small glass (125ml) of wine, or a single measure (25ml) of spirits (see table on page 27).

There is more information about alcohol and drinking guidelines at [drinkaware.co.uk/](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/)

Number of calories and units of alcohol in a drink

Drink	Calories	Units of alcohol
 Pint of lager	170 to 250	2
 Standard glass of white wine (175ml)	130 to 160	2
 Single vodka (25ml with a mixer)	115	1

Tips for cutting down on alcohol:

- Have a lager shandy using a low-calorie lemonade.
- Add low-calorie or calorie-free mixers to spirits or white wine.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with low-calorie, non-alcoholic ones.
- Have a glass of water with each alcoholic drink.

Making changes

It is not always easy to make major changes to our lives. It can be even more challenging when you have to cope with cancer, and maybe cancer treatment, too.

Some people eat more when life is stressful. This is known as comfort eating. Others are so busy that they do not have time to look at healthier options when food shopping. It can sometimes be easier to choose ready meals. And for some people, the price of food is an issue.

You may want to make changes to your diet gradually, at a budget you can afford, and when you feel ready. You could start by writing down what you normally eat for a few weeks. Compare this with information on healthy eating. Then set yourself some small, realistic goals, and decide how you will achieve them.

For example, if you have never had fruit with breakfast, you could try adding fresh or stewed fruit, or having a glass of fruit juice. For snacks, try swapping chocolate with a small portion of dried fruit and nuts. Gradually increase your goals over time. Keep track of your progress and how you feel physically and emotionally. Making changes can be enjoyable. You may discover new foods that you have not tried before.

Before making changes to your diet, it can help to talk to a dietitian, your GP or a specialist nurse. This may be especially useful if you have any special dietary requirements or medical needs. A dietitian can help you make changes. They can also advise you about any other dietary problems you might have during or after your cancer treatment.

Whether you choose to make small or big changes to your diet, it may take time to find healthy foods that you like, or a diet that works for you. It can help to try different foods. This can stop you getting bored and may help motivate you to continue a healthy diet in the long term.

'Try to identify a small number of changes and work on those initially, rather than trying to change too much at once. Small, sustained changes will have the most impact.'

Barbara, Macmillan dietitian

Keeping to a healthy weight

It is not good to be either overweight or underweight. Eating too much can make you overweight, which can lead to health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. Not eating as much food as your body needs can also affect your health.

Many people in the UK are heavier than the recommended weight for their height. And unfortunately, certain types of treatment for cancer, such as hormonal therapies or steroids, can lead to weight gain.

Losing weight can be difficult, but trying to keep to a healthy weight is one of the best ways to reduce your risk of developing cancer. Being overweight increases the risk of many types of cancer, including bowel, kidney, womb and gullet (oesophagus) cancer. Women who are overweight and have been through the menopause are at an increased risk of breast cancer.

There is also evidence that women who have breast cancer after the menopause may be able to reduce their risk of the cancer coming back by keeping to a healthy body weight after treatment. Being overweight may also increase the chances of complications if you need surgery.

Try to keep your weight within the normal range for your height. Your GP can advise you on your ideal weight. If you are concerned about your weight, get in touch with your GP or a dietitian for advice and support. Dietitians can give you advice about healthier food choices that are lower in calories but still make you feel full. Fruit and vegetables are better foods to fill yourself up with than unhealthier snacks such as biscuits and cake.

Be patient with yourself. Losing weight is a gradual process. It is important to eat a healthy, balanced diet to make sure you get all the nutrients you need to keep your body healthy. It is reasonable to aim to lose about 0.5 to 1kg (1lb to 2lbs) a week.

Top tips for keeping to a healthy weight:

- Only eat as much food as you need, according to how active you are. You may need to discuss this with a dietitian.
- Eat a healthy diet with lots of fruit and vegetables, and less fat and sugar.
- Try to be more physically active.

We have information about different ways to keep active. You can order our booklet **Physical activity and cancer** at be.macmillan.org.uk We also have information on our website at macmillan.org.uk/beactive

Using a food and activity planner

Writing down your meals and exercise each week can help you plan in advance. It can also be a good way to keep track of how you are doing.

We have included a pull-out planner that you can use to help you manage your weight.

Tips for using the planner

- Photocopy the planner before you fill it in, so you can use a new one each week.
- Keep a note of everything you eat for a week if you can.
- You can then see what you have done well and use it to plan for the next week. You will also have a record to show your doctor or dietitian.
- Tick off each portion of fruit and vegetables you eat.
- Use the activity section to plan and record physical activities.
- At times when you have eaten a lot, make a note of where you were, who you were with and how you were feeling. This may help you spot any eating habits that are causing weight gain.

When you are getting used to life after cancer treatment, being able to talk to people going through the same thing can help. Visit [community.macmillan.org.uk](https://www.community.macmillan.org.uk) to chat to others and share your experiences.



Healthy eating tips

As well as making healthy choices when choosing or cooking your food, these tips will help you keep to a healthy weight.

Change your habits

- **Start the day with a healthy breakfast.** This will help you cut out morning snacks and feel less hungry at lunchtime.
- **Eat at the table rather than in front of the TV.** Concentrating on your food helps you enjoy it more and makes you feel more full. This makes it easier to avoid snacking between meals.
- **Make sure you drink plenty of fluids.** Sometimes we mistake being thirsty for being hungry. Have a glass of water before meals.
- **Tell your family and friends what you are doing so they can support you.**

Cut down portion sizes

The amount you eat is just as important as what you eat. If you eat large portions, you are more likely to gain weight. There are things you can do to help cut down your food portions:

- **Use a smaller dinner plate.** Bigger plates need more food to fill them.
- **Enjoy a healthy starter,** such as low-fat soup, melon or salad, before your main meal.
- **Eat slowly and avoid second helpings.** It takes about 20 minutes for your stomach to tell your brain that you are full, so rest for a while before deciding whether you want more.
- **Avoid snacking straight from a bag or packet.** Put the amount of food you want to eat on a plate.
- **It is important to always eat main meals.**

Our booklet **Recipes for people affected by cancer** has lots of recipe ideas that you might find helpful. You can order a free copy at be.macmillan.org.uk or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

'It is the only thing we can really do anything about, but that doesn't mean we should be beating ourselves up about our weight. We have to be kind to ourselves and remember our bodies have been through a lot. That said, I recognised that I needed to lose weight to get a bit of the old "me" back.'

Fiona, Online Community member

Eating and socialising

Food gives us what we need to keep our bodies healthy and energised. But it is also an important part of our social lives, whether we are spending time with family and friends at meals and barbecues, or celebrating with treats like cakes. Sometimes we eat a favourite food to reward ourselves.

Even when you have successfully changed to a healthier balanced diet, you may not always feel like following it strictly. This is normal. Everyone enjoys having an occasional treat or meal out. You could try having a smaller portion than you would normally have. But if you are eating well most of the time, you can allow yourself less healthy foods when socialising or celebrating.

Another idea is to have one 'free' day a week, when you eat whatever you want. You may quickly find that the healthier you eat, the less you crave the so-called 'forbidden foods'. Your idea of treats may also change to healthier options.

'I try and have my five portions of fruit and veg a day, wholemeal bread and things like that. But I eat meat. I use butter. I drink alcohol. And I aim to do those things in moderation rather than give them up.'

Ali

Fast foods and eating out

Fast food is usually high in energy and fat. If you eat a lot of fast food, it is important to cut down, as these foods can cause you to put on weight.

Try to plan your healthy meals and snacks in advance. This can stop you buying fast food and takeaways at the last minute.

Even when you have changed to a healthier way of eating, there may be times when you want to be more relaxed, and this is fine. You can still enjoy treats or a meal out with family or friends.



If you are having takeaway food or eating out often, you could:

- look for the healthier options on the menu – these may be labelled as ‘light’ options
- have boiled or jacket potatoes, without oil or butter, instead of chips or creamy mash
- ask about the ingredients in meals, or how they are prepared, and choose baked options rather than fried
- try to avoid bread or nibbles before the starter and main course
- ask for a standard or smaller portion size, and avoid large or super-size options
- order a starter as a main course
- have steamed or boiled rice rather than fried rice, such as pilau or egg-fried rice
- choose tomato-based sauces with vegetables rather than creamy sauces
- order vegetables or a side salad if they are not included with the meal
- share a main course with someone
- wait after finishing your main course before ordering a pudding, as it can take time after finishing your meal to feel full
- order fruit salad or a fruit-based dessert
- ask for low-fat or low-sugar yoghurt as an alternative to ice-cream or cream.

We have more information about making healthy food choices on pages 34 to 35.

Food hygiene

If your immune system is weak, you are more at risk of getting food poisoning because you are less able to fight infection. You may also be less able to cope with the symptoms of food poisoning.

To reduce this risk, you should:

- use ingredients that are as fresh as possible
- use foods before the use-by date
- store food and drink at the correct temperature (see the packaging for instructions)
- wash your hands before you handle food
- cook food thoroughly
- avoid mouldy food
- keep pets out of the kitchen
- wash all fruit and vegetables well in cold running water – do not soak them unless you are using dried lentils or beans
- clean cooking utensils and chopping boards thoroughly
- wipe worktops with hot, soapy water or an anti-bacterial spray, particularly after you have used them to prepare raw meat or eggs
- wash or replace dishcloths and tea towels regularly.

Leftovers

If you decide to store food to eat later, let it cool down completely and then store it in the fridge or freezer. Freezing extra portions can save you time later, and is a useful thing to do before your treatment starts. Remember to defrost your foods fully before re-heating them. This is especially important if you have low immunity due to treatment. Only reheat food once and make sure it is piping hot right through before you eat it. Take care not to burn your mouth or tongue if you are re-heating food.

Eating out

It is best to avoid eating out if your immunity is low. If you do eat out, eat somewhere where you know the food is freshly prepared and make sure it is thoroughly cooked. Avoid buying food from salad bars, buffets and street vendors, as it is difficult to know how fresh the food is. Also avoid having ice-cream from an ice-cream van.

Common questions about diet and cancer

Can diet reduce the risk of cancer coming back?

People often ask whether what they eat can reduce their risk of the cancer returning. There is some early evidence from breast and bowel cancer studies that diet may affect the chances of the cancer coming back. But there still is not enough clear information to make precise recommendations about what someone with a type of cancer should eat. In general, cancer experts recommend following a healthy, balanced diet for the whole body and not just the prevention of one type of cancer.

For most people, the factors that are likely to have the greatest impact on their health include diet, weight control and regular physical activity. The biggest difference will probably be from a combination of factors, rather than from making one change.

Your healthcare team (this includes your GP, dietitian, doctors and nurses) are the best people to advise you whether there are any lifestyle changes you can make that may help reduce your risk of cancer coming back.



What foods should I avoid when I have low immunity?

If your medical team has told you that your immunity may be low during treatment, ask them whether there is any special dietary advice you should follow.

For most people, low immunity will not last long, so there is no need to follow a special diet. If you are having more intensive chemotherapy or a bone marrow transplant, your specialist doctor and nurse will explain more about which foods you need to avoid when your immunity is low.

Here are a few general tips:

- You should avoid pâté, raw eggs and any product containing raw egg (such as homemade mayonnaise), raw seafood, probiotic food products, unpasteurised milk and cheeses made from unpasteurised milk (such as parmesan, and mould-ripened and blue-veined cheeses).
- Ensure your hands are clean while cooking and before eating.
- Make sure your food is well-cooked, especially meat and fish.
- If you eat raw foods, such as salads or fruit, make sure they are washed thoroughly.
- Store food following the instructions on the packaging, and check the best before and use-by dates.
- Be careful when eating out. Be aware of food choices and how food is prepared and cooked.

Should I take dietary supplements?

For most people, a healthy, balanced diet provides all the nutrients they need. Large doses of vitamins, minerals and other dietary supplements are not usually recommended. But people who find it difficult to eat a balanced diet may benefit from taking a multivitamin or mineral supplement containing up to 100% of the recommended daily allowance. A doctor, nurse or dietitian will be able to advise on this.

Supplements may help in some situations, such as for people who cannot absorb all the nutrients they need because of surgery for stomach cancer. People at an increased risk of bone thinning (osteoporosis) may also benefit from taking calcium and vitamin D supplements to help strengthen their bones.

Studies looking at whether taking supplements can reduce the risk of developing certain cancers have been disappointing. In general, the evidence shows that taking supplements does not reduce the risk of cancer. There is even evidence that taking high doses of some supplements can increase the risk of cancer developing in some people.

It is possible that some supplements may interfere with how cancer treatments work and make them less effective. If you are currently having cancer treatment, it is important to get advice from your cancer specialist before taking any supplements. They can advise you about any you should take, and which doses might be suitable for you. They can also tell you about any possible side effects and interactions with other medicines.

'There are no specific vitamin pills I would recommend, unless these have been prescribed specially by your consultant. Eating a well-balanced and varied diet should give you all the vitamins you need.'

Jenny, dietitian

What about 'superfoods'?

There is no scientific evidence for any particular food being a 'superfood'. The greatest benefit to your health is likely to come from eating a balanced diet that includes a wide and varied combination of foods.

Instead of concentrating on a particular 'superfood', it is better to aim for a varied and healthy diet, including lots of different types of fruit, vegetables and wholegrain foods. This will help you make sure you are getting the widest possible variety of nutrients. It will also make your diet more enjoyable and interesting, and will probably be cheaper too.

'There are no so-called "superfoods" that we would suggest you have. There is a lot of information out there that promotes these sorts of foods, but the general principles of a "healthy diet" remain.'

Jenny, dietitian



Should I follow a dairy-free diet?

Many research studies have looked for a link between diets that are high in dairy products and cancer (particularly breast and prostate cancer). But these studies have not found a clear link. Because of this, cancer experts do not recommend following a dairy-free diet to try to reduce the risk of cancer.

Dairy products are an important source of protein, calcium and some vitamins. But they can be high in fat. Choose low-fat products to avoid putting on weight. Calcium is needed for strong bones, and may help reduce the risk of bowel cancer.

If you decide to follow a dairy-free diet, you will need to make sure you get enough calcium from other foods, such as:

- tinned sardines and salmon (with bones)
- dark green, leafy vegetables, such as spinach
- kidney beans
- dried figs
- foods fortified with calcium, such as some types of soya, rice, almond or oat milk.

Does sugar feed cancer?

Sugar does not directly increase the risk of cancer or encourage it to grow. But sugar contains no useful nutrients, apart from energy, and we can get all the energy we need from healthier sources. Too much sugar can lead to weight gain. It is best to limit the amount of sugar in your diet, unless you have received specialist advice from a dietitian. Foods high in sugar include biscuits, chocolate, sweets, syrups, cake, fruit juice and fizzy drinks.

Should I only eat organic food?

Many people wonder whether they should follow an organic diet to prevent cancer coming back. Some studies claim that organic fruit and vegetables have better flavour and stay fresh for longer. But others find them expensive and do not see the value of them compared to non-organic products. So far, no research has been done to find out whether an organic diet is more effective than a non-organic diet at stopping cancer coming back.

Some people may worry that pesticides used in non-organic farming may cause cancer. In the UK, a pesticide can only be used once its safety has been tested. Laws ensure that all agricultural pesticides are used within a safe level.

Genetically modified (GM) crops have been proved to be safe in the time they have been grown. But some people might feel that the long-term effects are unknown, and so choose not to eat them.

It is your choice whether you buy organic or non-organic food. Current advice is to thoroughly wash all fruit and vegetables before use, whether they are non-organic or organic. This removes any form of pesticide and harmful bacteria.

Do anti-cancer diets work?

There has been a lot of publicity about alternative diets for treating cancer over the past few years. Many dramatic claims for cures have been made. It is understandable that people may want to know about diets that seem to offer the hope of a cure. However, there is no evidence that these diets can shrink a cancer, increase a person's chance of survival, or cure the cancer.

Some people get satisfaction from following these types of diet, but others find them expensive, unpleasant to eat and time-consuming to prepare. Some diets may lack important nutrients or be unbalanced in other ways, and may even be harmful. Some of the diets can be difficult to follow and you might be left feeling guilty if you find it hard to follow the instructions.

It can be confusing to have conflicting advice about what to eat. Dietitians, doctors and specialist nurses recommend a well-balanced and enjoyable diet as the best way to keep healthy. If you do choose to follow a specific diet, it might be worth speaking with a dietitian to check whether you are missing any important nutrients.

'A juice diet is not necessarily something health professionals would recommend during chemotherapy or at any time. I would be concerned that you might be missing essential nutrients found in other foods.'

Jenny, dietitian

About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

Order what you need

You may want to order more leaflets or booklets like this one. Visit [be.macmillan.org.uk](https://www.be.macmillan.org.uk) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets on different cancer types, treatments and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer and information for carers, family and friends.

Online information

All of our information is also available at [macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support)

There you'll also find videos featuring real-life stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- easy read booklets
- eBooks
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats)

If you'd like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That's why we always involve them in our work. If you've been affected by cancer, you can help us improve our information.

We give you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, leaflets and fact sheets.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@macmillan.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like, and we don't ask for any special skills – just an interest in our cancer information.



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you.

Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

- help with any medical questions you have about cancer or your treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial guidance
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **[macmillan.org.uk/talktous](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/talktous)**

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. There, you can speak with someone face to face.

Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence.

Find your nearest centre at **[macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres)** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That's why we help to bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)

Online Community

Thousands of people use our Online Community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)

The Macmillan healthcare team

Our nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

'Everyone is so supportive on the Online Community, they know exactly what you're going through. It can be fun too. It's not all just chats about cancer.'

Mal, Online Community member

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you've been affected in this way, we can help.

Financial guidance

Our financial team can give you guidance on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.

Help accessing benefits

Our benefits advisers can offer advice and information on benefits, tax credits, grants and loans. They can help you work out what financial help you could be entitled to. They can also help you complete your forms and apply for benefits.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing to a much-needed break.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport)** to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you're an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide support and information to help you manage cancer at work. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)**

My Organiser app

Our free mobile app can help you manage your treatment, from appointment times and contact details, to reminders for when to take your medication. Search 'My Organiser' on the Apple App Store or Google Play on your phone.

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

Nutrition and diet information and support

British Dietetic Association (BDA)

Tel 0121 200 8080

Email info@bda.uk.com

www.bda.uk.com

Provides training and facilities for registered dietitians. The website includes food facts, and has information on the role of dietitians and how to find a dietitian.

CORE

Tel 020 7486 0341

Email info@corecharity.org.uk

www.corecharity.org.uk

Funds research into a range of gut, liver, intestinal and bowel illnesses. The website provides information on digestive disorders, treatments and coping with the effects of digestive disorders.

Diabetes UK

Tel 0345 123 2399

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 6pm)

Email info@diabetes.org.uk

Scotland 0141 212 8710

Email scotland@diabetes.co.uk

www.diabetes.org.uk

Gives information and support on any aspect of managing diabetes, including medication, diet and exercise.

General cancer support organisations

Cancer Black Care

Tel 020 8961 4151

Email

info@cancerblackcare.org.uk

www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Offers UK-wide information and support for people with cancer, as well as their friends, carers and families, with a focus on those from BME communities.

Cancer Focus

Northern Ireland

Helpline 0800 783 3339

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 1pm)

Email

nurseline@cancerfocusni.org

www.cancerfocusni.org

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland, including a free helpline, counselling and links to local support groups.

Cancer Research UK

Helpline 0808 800 4040

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

www.cancerresearchuk.org

A UK-wide organisation that has patient information on all types of cancer. Also has a clinical trials database.

Cancer Support Scotland

Tel 0800 652 4531

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

Email

info@cancersupportscotland.org

www.

cancersupportscotland.org

Runs cancer support groups throughout Scotland. Also offers free complementary therapies and counselling to anyone affected by cancer.

Macmillan Cancer Voices

www.macmillan.org.uk/

cancervoices

A UK-wide network that enables people who have or have had cancer, and those close to them such as family and carers, to speak out about their experience of cancer.

Maggie's Centres

Tel 0300 123 1801

Email

enquiries@maggiescentres.org

www.maggiescentres.org

Has a network of centres in various locations throughout the UK. Provides free information about cancer and financial benefits. Also offers emotional and social support to people with cancer, their family, and friends.

Penny Brohn UK

Helpline 0303 3000 118
(Mon to Fri, 9.30am to 5pm)

Email

helpline@pennybrohn.org.uk

www.pennybrohn.org.uk

Offers a combination of physical, emotional and spiritual support across the UK, using complementary therapies and self-help techniques.

Riprap

www.riprap.org.uk

Developed especially for teenagers in the UK who have a parent with cancer. Has an online forum where teenagers going through similar experiences can talk to each other for support.

Tenovus

Helpline 0808 808 1010
(Daily, 8am to 8pm)

Email

info@tenovuscancercare.org.uk

www.

tenovuscancercare.org.uk

Aims to help everyone in the UK get equal access to cancer treatment and support. Funds research and provides support such as mobile cancer support units, a free helpline, benefits advice and an online 'Ask the nurse' service.

Emotional and mental health support

Mind

Helpline 0300 123 3393

Text 86463

Email info@mind.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

Provides information, advice and support to anyone with a mental health problem through its helpline and website.

Samaritans

Helpline 116 123

Email jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Samaritans branches are located across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Provides confidential and non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Support for carers

Carers Trust

Tel (England) 0300 772 9600

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

(Scotland) 0300 123 2008

(Wales) 0292 0090 087

(Northern Ireland)

028 9099 9476

Email info@carers.org

www.carers.org

www.carers.org/carers-services/find-your-local-service (find services local to you)

Provides support, information, advice and services for people caring at home for

a family member or friend. You can find details for UK offices and search for local support on the website.

Carers UK

Helpline

(England, Scotland, Wales)

0808 808 7777

(Mon to Wed, 10am to 4pm)

Helpline (Northern Ireland)

028 9043 9843

Email advice@carersuk.org

www.carersuk.org

Offers information and support to carers across the UK. Has an online forum and can put people in contact with support groups for carers in their area.



You can search for more organisations on our website at macmillan.org.uk/organisations or call us on 0808 808 00 00.

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

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

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

Sources

We've added an example of a source we used in the booklet below. If you'd like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

The Lancet. Body-mass index and risk of 22 specific cancers: a population-based cohort study of 5.24 million UK adults. 2014.

Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It's just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They're produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we're there to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.



Share your cancer experience

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

Campaign for change

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

Help someone in your community

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

Raise money

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

Give money

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

Call us to find out more

0300 1000 200

macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved

Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other _____

Name _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please accept my gift of £ _____

(Please delete as appropriate)

I enclose a cheque / postal order /
Charity Voucher made payable to
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:

Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity
Card / Switch / Maestro

Card number

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Signature _____

Date / / _____

Don't let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

- I am a UK tax payer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I make or have made to Macmillan Cancer Support in the last 4 years as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.



If you'd rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to:
Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851,
89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

This booklet is for people living with cancer or after cancer treatment who want to know more about a healthy diet. It explains why diet is important and has tips on how to eat well and keep to a healthy weight. It also answers some common questions about diet and cancer.

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call **0808 808 00 00** 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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CANCER SUPPORT**

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