

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT

HOW ARE YOU FEELING?

The emotional effects of cancer



I spoke to a counsellor, and he helped keep me sane and made me realise that how I was feeling was what lots of other people deal with too. I didn't want to admit I was finding it very difficult.

Lizzy, diagnosed with oesophageal cancer



About this booklet

Having cancer affects all areas of your life, including the way you feel. This booklet is about the main emotions that many people with cancer have. This may be after diagnosis, during treatment or after treatment has ended.

We hope you find this booklet helpful in dealing with some of the feelings that you may have. There are also suggestions of things that you can try to help you cope.

How to use this booklet

This booklet is split into sections to help you find what you need. You do not have to read it from start to finish. You can use the contents list on page 5 to help you.

It is fine to skip parts of the booklet. You can always come back to them when you feel ready.

On pages 111 to 114, there are some useful addresses and websites. There is also space to write down questions and notes on page 116.

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

Quotes

In this booklet, we have included quotes from people affected by cancer. Some are from our Online Community ([macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)). The others are from people who have chosen to share their story with us, including Lizzy, who is on the cover of this booklet. To share your experience, visit [macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory)

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](https://www.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](https://www.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, your cancer diagnosis and your treatment 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.



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'It was quite an emotional time but I truly felt that I was lucky to be alive. I found a positivity that I didn't know I had, and that gave me a lot of strength.'

Waheed, diagnosed with bone cancer

CANCER AND YOUR FEELINGS

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Common thoughts and feelings

If you have cancer, it may mean you have to deal with things that frighten and challenge you. Many people feel overwhelmed when they are told they have cancer. But there is no right or wrong way to feel.

Common thoughts and fears about cancer include the following:

- I do not want to lose my independence and freedom.
- I do not want people to treat me differently.
- I am worried about my job.
- I may have to make changes to my lifestyle.
- I am worried about money.
- Will I die?

These are likely to be very real concerns for you and those close to you. It is fine to worry about these things or be upset by them. And it is fine to cry and say how you feel when things feel difficult.

People have different reactions and emotions at different times. You may have sudden changes in your mood and feelings. This is part of what many people go through when dealing with an illness. You may have these feelings at any time after your cancer diagnosis.

Your feelings

It is common to have many different emotions when you are told you have cancer. These can be difficult to cope with. We talk about some common feelings here. Partners, family and friends may also have some of the same feelings.

There are lots of different reactions to cancer. You might not have any of the emotions we talk about here. There is no right or wrong way to feel. You will cope with things in your own way.

Talking to family, friends or other people affected by cancer, may help. Or you may get support from your healthcare team.

Shock and denial

You may find it hard to believe that you have cancer when you are first diagnosed. It is common to feel shocked and numb. You may not be able to understand all the information you are given. You may find that you keep asking the same questions. At first, it can be hard to talk about the cancer. Or you might find it hard to think or talk about anything else. Both reactions are normal. Your mind is trying to process what is happening. These feelings usually get easier over time.

Fear and anxiety

You may be anxious or frightened about whether treatments will work and what will happen in the future. This can be one of the hardest things to cope with. It can help to try to focus on things you can control. You may want to find out more about the cancer, your treatment options, and how to manage any side effects. It can also help to talk about your feelings. Try to keep doing the things that are important to you and that you enjoy.

Sadness and depression

You may feel sad if you have to change your plans because of the cancer, or if your future feels uncertain. Feeling sad is a natural reaction to changes or loss. This feeling may come and go during and after your treatment. For most people, these periods of sadness get better. But for some people, the sadness may continue or get worse. If you think the sadness may be turning into depression, there are things you can do to help.

Avoidance

You may cope by trying not to find out much about the cancer. Or by not talking about it. If you feel like this, tell people that you do not want to talk about it right now. You can also tell your cancer doctor if there are things you do not want to know or talk about yet.

Sometimes, it may be hard to accept that you have cancer. This can stop you making decisions about treatment. If this happens, it is very important to get help from your healthcare team.

You may feel that your family or friends are avoiding you or avoiding talking about the cancer. This is usually because they are also finding it difficult to cope. They may need support too. Try to tell them how this makes you feel. It may help you, and your family and friends, to talk openly about how you are feeling.

Anger

You may feel angry about your diagnosis. You may also resent other people for being well. These are normal reactions. They are more likely when you feel frightened, stressed or unwell. You may get angry with your family, friends or partner. Tell them you are angry at your illness and not at them. Finding ways to relax can help with anger. This can include talking about or writing down how you feel, doing gentle exercise, having relaxation therapy or meditating.

Guilt and blame

You may feel guilty or blame yourself for the cancer. You may want to find reasons for why it has happened to you. Most of the time, it is impossible to know exactly what causes a cancer. Over time, a combination of different risk factors may cause a cancer. Doctors do not fully understand all these factors yet. Try to focus on looking after yourself and getting the help and support you need.

Feeling alone

You may feel alone or isolated. This could be because you do not think you have support. Family and friends may live far away, be busy, or feel uncomfortable talking about the cancer. Try to tell your family and friends how you feel. This can help them find ways to support you.

You may have times when you want to be alone for a while. But if you find you are avoiding people a lot of the time, try to talk to your doctor or nurse.

If you need more support, you can call the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00** and talk to one of our cancer support specialists. Our website can help you find local support groups. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups)** You can also talk to other people affected by cancer on our Online Community. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)**



Advanced cancer

If your cancer doctor has told you the cancer is advanced, you may feel shocked and find it hard to accept. You may feel frightened, angry or worried about the future. With time, these feelings can become more manageable. Some people find that making plans and decisions helps them feel more in control.

Some people may live with advanced cancer for a long time – sometimes for years. During this time, many people carry on with their daily lives and do things that are important to them.

Our booklet **Coping with advanced cancer** has more information (see page 106).



Do feelings affect the cancer?

Cancer is influenced by many things, including our environment, diet, genetics and physical health. Your feelings and attitudes can affect the way you cope with cancer and its treatment. But there is no evidence that these things can affect the cancer itself.

There is also no evidence that feeling negative or sad can affect your recovery from cancer. So whatever you are feeling is okay. It is important that you can talk honestly, and cry if you need to. This can help release tension and stress. It can also bring you closer to the person you are talking to.

You can call the Macmillan support line on **0808 808 00 00** or find local support. You can also ask your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or GP for advice and help getting support.



TALKING ABOUT CANCER

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Talking and getting support

Many people do not like talking about cancer and how it is affecting them. You may find the idea of talking upsetting or uncomfortable. But talking to someone about how you feel can help you cope with your emotions. It is often the first step in helping you feel better. Talking about things can make you feel supported. It can also help you make decisions that are best for you.

You may want to talk to someone you know well. This could be a partner, family member or friend.

Or you may find it easier to talk to someone you do not know well. This could be your cancer doctor, GP or specialist nurse, or a religious or spiritual leader. Your doctor or nurse may be able to refer you to a psychologist or counsellor. Some organisations like Mind (see page 111) can offer this type of support too.

You might find self-help groups or online communities useful. This might be a good option if you find it hard to talk to the people close to you. Visit **community.macmillan.org.uk** to join our Online Community. You can also speak to one of our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00**.

How talking can help

There are a few ways that talking may help you:

- You may feel more supported and less anxious. Knowing someone else understands, cares and is there for you can reassure you that you are not alone.
- It can help you understand your feelings. When you keep everything inside, your thoughts often feel confusing. Talking can make your thoughts clearer.
- Talking allows you to express how you are feeling. Having a lot of concerns can feel overwhelming. Talking can ease the pressure and make you feel better.
- It helps you to know that your feelings are normal. You may feel guilty, weak or angry after a cancer diagnosis. Having someone listen to you without judging can reassure you that your thoughts are normal.
- Talking puts things into perspective. The more you worry about something, the worse it seems. It can be a big relief to say your feelings out loud.
- It can help you make important decisions. Talking can help you process how you feel about things. When you have to make decisions, you often think you know what other people are thinking or feeling. But sometimes they may surprise you with their views and help with tough decisions.

Talking to family and friends

If you can, talk openly about your feelings with people you trust. It can help you feel less anxious and frightened. Try to start a conversation and say how you feel. You may be surprised at how willing people are to listen and support you. When you ask someone for support, it can show them that you value them.

Do not feel you have to protect family and friends by always trying to be positive and look like you are doing well. The people close to you usually want to know how you are really feeling. Then they can support you. Being open also shows family and friends that it is okay for them to talk about their own feelings.

Sometimes it can be difficult to talk, even with close family and friends. You may worry about upsetting them or having to deal with their feelings, too. You may think they will not understand how you feel. But their reactions may surprise you. Some may disappoint you, but people are often more supportive than you expect.

You can call the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00** if there are times you do not feel like talking to family and friends.

Asking for support

Talking to another person is often the first step to getting the support you need. You may find it helpful to:

- tell the person that you want to talk about the cancer – this lets them know that they should listen
- think about what is most important to you – you may find it difficult to focus at first because there is a lot on your mind, but try to focus on a few important things
- write down what is worrying you so you can stay focused
- start by saying something general, such as, 'I am worried about how things are at the moment'
- ask if the other person understands what you are saying
- if you both agree on certain actions to take, mention these again at the end of the conversation
- remember that it is okay to chat about other things too – you do not have to talk about serious issues all the time and chatting about everyday things can help.

On the next page we have a tool you can use to write down the kind of support you need. Sharing this with people you trust may help them support you in the way you need.

This tool and the tools on pages 29, 73 and 88 were written by people affected by cancer. You can find more tools, stories and help using the tools at **thinkaboutyourlife.org**

If you have any comments about these thinking tools, please email **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

If you do not want to talk

There may be times when you do not feel like talking. You may just want to be on your own. Do not feel that you have to see people if you do not want to.

If you can, let other people answer your door or phone for you. If you are in hospital, you may want to limit the number of visitors you have. You can ask a family member or the nurses to help you with this.

We have more information about talking to people about cancer. We also have information for family and friends on talking with someone who has cancer. See page 106 for ordering details.



MANAGING FEAR AND ANXIETY

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Dealing with change

Uncertainty can be one of the hardest feelings to deal with. Not knowing what is going to happen might make you feel irritable, angry and frightened.

Feeling that we have some control over our lives makes us feel secure. This allows us to enjoy the things we do and make plans for the future. But being diagnosed with cancer can take away that feeling of security. It can make you uncertain about what will happen.

You may find that doctors cannot answer some of your questions, or that you are unsure what their answers mean. For example, it is often impossible for them to say how well a treatment will work. Doctors may know the statistics for how many people will benefit from a treatment. But they cannot predict how it will affect you.

Many people find this uncertainty hard to cope with. We have tips for things you can do to help you manage your feelings (see pages 75 to 95).

Anxiety

Feeling anxious is a natural reaction to an uncertain situation. But if it affects how you cope with daily life, you may need help. Symptoms of anxiety include:

- not being able to concentrate
- being irritable
- being easily distracted
- feeling restless
- having a constant feeling of dread.

If you are anxious you may also notice some physical symptoms such as:

- having tense muscles
- feeling short of breath
- feeling dizzy
- sweating
- having a dry mouth
- being unable to sleep
- feeling tired
- having digestive problems.

Other people telling you that everything will be okay can sometimes make anxiety worse. You may feel that they are not listening to you, or that they do not understand your worries.

Managing stress and anxiety

Living with stress and anxiety can be hard. There are things you can do to help manage your stress and cope with the physical symptoms. For example:

- if you feel like talking, talk to someone who is a good listener – this may be a friend, partner or family member, your doctor or nurse, or a professional counsellor or psychologist
- think about your breathing – breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose and slowly out through your mouth
- put on music you enjoy and close your eyes – this can help you feel calmer
- do some physical activity – even a short walk can help with anxiety
- keep a diary of what makes you anxious – this can help you avoid those situations if possible
- try activities or treatments such as yoga, meditation, massage or reflexology (see pages 90 to 94) – these may help you relax and manage your anxiety.

If you feel your anxiety is getting worse, speak to your GP, specialist nurse or a psychologist or counsellor. They can help you find ways of coping with it. Many people who have anxiety may also have depression (see pages 31 to 37). Speaking to your healthcare team is the best way to get the help you need.

You may find it helpful to contact Anxiety UK – visit **[anxietyuk.org.uk](https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)** You may also find it helps to join a support group – visit **[macmillan.org.uk/inyourarea](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/inyourarea)** to search for local groups. We have more information on talking therapies on pages 47 to 50.

You may find this thinking tool helpful. It might help if you are talking to people about how you are feeling. Even if you do not want to share it, you may still find it useful. There is also space for you to think about what you can do next to help.



Hopes

To return to work once my treatment has ended



Fears

That my savings will run out

Next steps

Ring the Macmillan support line and check if I can claim any benefits.



'I woke up the next morning bawling my eyes out. I just wanted to get the feelings out of my system. I called my friend every night.'

Lara, diagnosed with breast cancer

MANAGING DEPRESSION AND SADNESS

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Do I have depression?

When you have cancer, you may feel sad at times. This may be at diagnosis, or during or after treatment. This is normal and for most people these feelings of sadness go away. There are positive things you can do that may help you feel better (see pages 75 to 95).

For some people, a low mood may continue or get worse. This may mean they have depression and need help or treatment to be able to cope. Depression is common and can be caused by different things. It may be related to the cancer, or it may happen for other reasons.

It can be difficult to know whether you are sad and worried about the cancer, or whether you have depression. Sometimes people notice your symptoms and suggest that you might need help.

Symptoms of depression

Sometimes it is difficult to know if you are depressed or not. Symptoms of depression can include:

- feeling low in mood or sad most of the time
- losing interest in things you used to enjoy, like your hobbies or social life
- changes in sleeping, eating or concentration
- feeling helpless or vulnerable
- problems starting or finishing tasks
- thinking about self-harm or suicide.

These are just some of the symptoms of depression. They will be different for each person. The cancer or its treatment can also cause some of these symptoms.

Remember, it is normal to have some of these feelings at times. But if they go on for more than a couple of weeks, talk to your cancer doctor, GP or specialist nurse.

If you have any thoughts about self-harm or suicide, you should contact your cancer doctor, GP or specialist nurse straight away.



Coping with depression

It is important to remember that depression is common and that there are things that can help. There are many ways to cope and there are different types of support. What works for one person may not work as well for another. The first step to feeling better is getting help.

Self-care, talking therapies (see pages 47 to 50) or medication (see pages 52 to 53) can all help.

Self-care

If you are sad or depressed, there are things you can do that may help. These include:

- getting enough sleep
- eating well
- keeping active
- doing things you enjoy
- being with people you like.

It can be hard to make the effort to do these things when your mood is low. Even small tasks may feel very difficult. Try to do one small thing at a time and celebrate your successes.

Getting help with depression

If you think you might have depression, speak to your GP. They can talk with you about your feelings and help you find ways to cope.

They may:

- give you a diagnosis, for example depression or anxiety
- refer you to another service, such as a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist
- give you details of a talking therapy service (see pages 47 to 50) you can contact yourself
- talk to you about medication (see pages 52 to 53).

These things may not happen at the first appointment. Your doctor may give you a questionnaire to fill in first. They will want to know more about:

- how you are feeling
- how your feelings are affecting you
- any treatments you have tried.

They ask these questions so they can work out the best way to help you. This may take time.

They may suggest ways of managing the depression, including talking therapies, medication or a combination of both.

Suicidal feelings

Suicidal feelings can be a reaction to emotions that you feel you cannot cope with. Some people who are very depressed feel they are a burden to other people. They may feel that their loved ones would be better off without them.

Often people who feel this way believe that no one can help them. This is not true.

It is very important to talk to someone. This could be your doctor, someone in your healthcare team, your therapist or a helpline. They can arrange specialist help for you.

Talk to someone if you have:

- thoughts about hurting yourself
- thoughts about killing yourself
- other symptoms you are worried about.

Specialist nurses and doctors can support you and help you feel better as quickly as possible. In some areas, specialist psychiatric support teams can visit you at home. If you cannot contact anyone or get help, go to your local Accident and Emergency department (A&E).

Samaritans has a 24-hour confidential helpline that provides support. The phone number is **116 123**.



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How to get help

If you are frightened by your feelings and emotions, or if you are becoming very anxious (see pages 26 to 29) or depressed (see pages 32 to 37), you can get help from a healthcare professional. This could be from:

- your healthcare team at the hospital
- your GP
- a mental health professional you referred yourself to
- online mental health services
- local charities and organisations
- private clinics.

If you have private health insurance, it may cover mental health support.

'After speaking to the psychologist at Macmillan, I realised that I wasn't on my own with this. It was all explained to me very clearly. I'm feeling lots better due to the advice that I've had.'

Alfie

Help from your healthcare team

Many people get a lot of support from the hospital staff who look after them during their treatment.

If you are having cancer treatment, you will have a clinical nurse specialist (CNS) or key worker. They are often your main contact at the hospital. They can give information and support to you and your family.

They can help with concerns you feel you cannot talk to your cancer doctor about. These could be worries about travelling, finances or work. They will also have details of local support groups and other organisations that may be able to help.

Help from your GP

If you have a GP appointment, try to plan what you want to say. It can help to write things down before the appointment. Appointments are usually short, but planning ahead will help you get what you need from your GP.

When you are with your GP, tell them how you really feel. Focus on what you are most worried about. This will help them give you the most helpful advice or treatment.

You may want to take a family member or friend with you to the appointment. They can help you remember everything you want to discuss. After the appointment they can also remind you what the doctor said. Some GPs are happy for you to record the discussion so you can listen to it later. Ask if your GP if this is okay before you start.

Your doctor may refer you to one of the following professionals:

- A counsellor, who is trained to listen and help people talk through their problems. They will not give advice or answers, but they can help you find your own ways to solve problems.
- A clinical psychologist, who is trained to understand what people think and feel and how they behave. They can help you look at thoughts or patterns of behaviour that are causing you problems. This is helpful in stressful situations, such as coping with cancer. They can also help people with their relationships.
- A psychiatrist, who is a doctor trained to diagnose and treat mental health problems, including depression and anxiety. Some psychiatrists are specially trained in looking after the mental health of people with cancer.
- A community psychiatric nurse, who is a nurse trained to help people live with all types of mental health problems.

There are many healthcare professionals who can help you cope with your feelings and emotions. Each one has a different role, but usually you will only need the help of one or two of them.

At the start, you may not feel comfortable talking about your feelings, but this should get easier. It is important to be open and honest with healthcare professionals. This will help you get the information and support that you need.

Self-referral

In England, Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) is a programme that offers talking therapies. These are for common mental health problems such as anxiety or depression. You can contact the service yourself. Go to [nhs.uk/service-search](https://www.nhs.uk/service-search) and search for psychological therapies (IAPT) to find your local service.

It is possible that IAPT will be expanded to cover more of the UK. At the moment, it is only available in England.

If you live in Scotland, call **0800 328 9655** (Monday to Friday, 1pm to 9pm) to access the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) telephone service. They will ask you to provide some details. They will then arrange an assessment appointment to discuss the service and how they can help. Visit www.nhs24.com/scot to find out more.

In Wales, there is no similar self-referral scheme. You will need to visit your GP for referral to counselling services through the NHS.

People living in Northern Ireland can call Lifeline on **0808 808 8000** to talk to a trained counsellor. They will help you identify the support you need. They can then arrange a face-to-face counselling appointment in your local area. This is usually within 7 days. Visit [lifelinehelpline.info](https://www.lifelinehelpline.info) for more information.

If you find it difficult to talk on the phone, you may be able to use email or online forms to get support.

Waiting times

Not all areas offer the same services, and waiting times can be long. While you wait, it is important to get the support you need. Many organisations offer support (see pages 111 to 114). You may be able to get support on the phone, by email or face-to-face through local support groups. It can help to keep a diary of your feelings and moods. Talk to your GP, cancer doctor or specialist nurse if you start to feel worse.

Online services

Online services are available to support people with mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. You can use these on a computer, smart phone or tablet. For some people, this can be just as helpful as face-to-face therapy.

You may be able to use online services for free on the NHS. You can ask your GP or therapist, or contact the services yourself. If they are not available on the NHS in your area, you may be able to pay for the services.

Visit [nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/self-help-therapies](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/self-help-therapies) to find out more.

Local charities and organisations

There are local counselling centres run by charities or counsellor training schools. These may offer support by phone, email or face-to-face through local support groups. You can also search online for low-cost counselling in your area to find an organisation near you.

Private clinics

Private therapists can often see you straight away. They can be expensive, though many offer lower rates if you are on a low income. Private therapy is useful if:

- you want a certain type of talking therapy
- you need quick access to treatment
- you want to continue therapy for longer than you can on the NHS.

You can find a private therapist through the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) – see page 111.



Talking therapies

Talking therapies can help many people, including those who have anxiety or depression. You talk to a trained therapist about your thoughts and feelings.

A therapist may be a counsellor or psychologist. You may meet your therapist regularly. This is usually once a week for several months. Some people continue to see a therapist for years. All therapy sessions are confidential. This means you can trust your therapist with information that may be personal or feel embarrassing.

Therapists help you recognise, understand and deal with your emotions. Types of talking therapies include counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and psychotherapy. You usually have an assessment first to find out more about your needs. The therapist can then use the talking therapies that will work best for you.

You usually have talking therapies one-to-one with a therapist. But you can also have them in groups. In group therapy, the therapist encourages group members to share their feelings and experiences with each other. Other types of therapy, such as mindfulness and meditation (see pages 91 to 92), involve practising techniques by yourself in your own time.

Your GP or a member of your healthcare team may be able to refer you for NHS talking therapies. Or you can contact the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) to find information about private therapy (see page 111).

Counselling

Counselling can help you talk about your feelings. It is a type of talking therapy. At your appointment, you can talk to a trained counsellor, who will listen and support you without judging you. Counsellors will not usually give advice or tell you what to do. But they can help you:

- cope with changes in your relationships
- think about what is important to you
- deal with practical problems
- find new ways of coping.

You may be offered a single session of counselling, a short course of sessions over a few weeks or months, or a longer course that lasts for several months or years. It can take a number of sessions, but you should slowly start to feel better with the help and support of your counsellor. Counselling can happen:

- face to face
- in a group
- over the phone
- by email
- online, through live chat services.

Some GPs, hospitals and cancer treatment centres have their own counsellors, or they can refer you to one. If your employer has an employee assistance programme (EAP), you can often contact a counsellor that way. Ask your employer for more information about this.

Counselling may be free, or you may need to pay for it. This is more likely if you see a counsellor long term.

You can call our support line on **0808 808 00 00** for more information about finding a counsellor. Or you can contact the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. See page 111 for contact details.

'Slowly positive effects have become noticeable, people have started mentioning that I am oozing confidence, and I am beginning to emerge from my cocoon.'

Lizzy

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a talking therapy. It can help you manage your problems better by changing the way you think and behave. It can be used to treat anxiety, panic attacks or depression, or other health problems.

The way we think can have a powerful effect on how we feel. People who are anxious or depressed often have negative patterns of thinking and behaviour. These can contribute to the anxiety or depression. CBT helps you to change these negative patterns.

The therapist will help you recognise the negative thoughts and help you find ways to change them. They will also help you find out which things give you a sense of satisfaction and pleasure.

You can ask your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or GP about any local support services that are available to you. You can also search for therapists on the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) website – see page 111 for details.

CBT and other types of therapy are available on the NHS. There are also online CBT programmes that you can do on your own.

Support from hospices

Your specialist nurse or hospital doctor may refer you to a hospice for support.

Hospices can help anyone with cancer and other chronic illnesses. They are not just people who are seriously ill. Some can offer psychological support and complementary therapies, such as massage and reflexology, as well as symptom control. The care is free, and it may help you relax and manage your stress better.

You do not always have to stay in the hospice. You can visit for day therapy. This gives you the chance to meet people going through similar experiences. It can also give your family or carers some time for themselves.

Anti-depressant medicines

Your doctor may prescribe an anti-depressant drug for you. There are different types of anti-depressant. Your doctors may need to try more than one to find which suits you best. You may not notice much improvement until at least 2 to 4 weeks after you start treatment. Your doctor will monitor how well they are working for you.

Most people need to take anti-depressants for at least 6 months to help them through their depression. Anti-depressants are not addictive, but you should not stop taking them suddenly as it can cause symptoms called withdrawal symptoms. When you stop taking anti-depressants, it is important to follow your doctor's advice.

'There are a thousand ways back to good mental health. Anti-depressants are working for me and I'm so glad I took the step of asking my GP to consider prescribing them.'

Sue

Side effects

Like all other drugs, anti-depressants can cause side effects. These are different for each drug and for each person. Ask your doctor to explain what the possible effects are. You can also read the leaflet that comes with the anti-depressant. This will tell you what to expect. Tell your doctor about any side effects you have.

It is important to follow your doctor's instructions when taking anti-depressants. Tell them about any other health conditions you have or other medicines you are taking. Some anti-depressants can react with other medicines. Rarely, anti-depressants can cause suicidal feelings (see page 57). If you are worried, talk to your doctor.

You can read more about anti-depressants on the Mind website. See page 111 for details.

St John's wort

St John's wort is a herbal treatment. But it is not recommended that you take it. It can react with other medicines, including cancer treatments. This can make them less effective. If you are thinking of taking St John's wort, it is important to speak to your doctor first.



FEELINGS AND PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

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Physical symptoms of stress

The stress of cancer and its treatment can affect you physically. You may notice changes to your energy levels, sleep patterns, appetite or sex drive. These effects and how long they last will be different for everyone.

Pain

Anxiety and depression can change how you react to pain. If you are anxious or depressed, pain may be harder to cope with. Dealing with your emotions can help reduce pain and improve your mood. Your doctor or nurse can help you manage both physical and emotional pain.

Extreme tiredness (fatigue)

Fatigue is extreme tiredness or exhaustion. People who are anxious or depressed can often feel like this. But it is also a common side effect of cancer or cancer treatments. This can make it difficult to know what is causing your tiredness. If you think your fatigue is because of anxiety or depression, speak to your GP. We also have some self-help ideas that may help (see pages 75 to 95). Our booklet **Coping with fatigue** also has more information (see page 106).



Sleep problems

Many people have trouble sleeping (insomnia) at some point in their life. If you have cancer, you may find it difficult to sleep. This could be because of general anxiety, worries about treatment or fears about the future.

It is important to try to have a sleep routine. There are things that you can do during the day to help you sleep better at night:

- Gentle exercise like walking will help you feel naturally tired.
- Try to keep your mind busy during the day – you may find it helps to read, play games or do puzzles.
- Some medicines, such as steroids, can affect your sleep. Ask your cancer doctor or specialist nurse if you can take them earlier in the day.
- Find a sleep pattern that works for you. Some people find a nap during the day helps them sleep better at night. But others sleep less well after a nap. Find out what works best for you.

There are also things you can do in the evenings or during the night to help you sleep better:

- Avoid large meals and caffeine in the evening. Try having a warm, milky drink before bed.
- Go to bed and get up at about the same times each day. Your body will get into a sleep pattern.
- Have a relaxing routine before bed. Try having a warm bath or shower, reading or listening to soothing music.
- Make your bedroom a relaxing place to be in. You may sleep better if it is dark, quiet and comfortable.
- If you cannot sleep, get up and go to another room if you can. It may help to do something else, like reading or listening to music, until you feel tired.
- If you have worries that keep you awake, write them down. You can then talk to someone about them later.

Relaxation CDs, apps or podcasts can also help you get to sleep. We have meditation and relaxation audio files and videos on our Learn Zone website – visit **[learnzone.org.uk](https://www.learnzone.org.uk)**

Loss of interest in sex

You may lose interest in sex if you are anxious or depressed. This may also happen if changes to your body affect your confidence or body image. Your relationship and sex life might change in different ways.

You may be reluctant to talk about this private part of your life. If you have a partner, it can help to talk to them about how you feel. You can explain that your lack of interest in sex does not mean you have lost interest in them. This may help you both feel more secure.

You may find it helps to focus more on being sensual rather than being sexual. Touch can be an important way of telling someone how you feel.

It may help to discuss your feelings with a trained counsellor or psychologist. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the charity Relate provides relationship counselling and offers support by phone and online. In Scotland, you can contact Relationships Scotland. If you identify as LGBT+, the LGBT Foundation also offers couples counselling.

You can also search on the BACP website for a trained therapist who specialises in sexual problems. See pages 111 to 112 for contact details of all these organisations.

You can also talk to your GP, cancer doctor or specialist nurse. They can look at whether any changes could be a side effect of medications. They will tell you if they can make changes to your medication. They may also be able to refer you to a specialist.

If you would prefer to speak to someone over the phone, you can call our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00**. We can also send you more information (see page 106).

Changes in appetite

Anxiety or depression can cause changes to your appetite. This may make you lose or gain weight.

We have more information about diet and cancer (see pages 111 to 114 for ordering details). There is advice on:

- having a healthy diet
- coping with eating problems caused by cancer or its treatment
- how to eat well if you do not feel hungry.



Panic attacks

A panic attack is an intense version of how you would normally respond to fear or stress. If you are very anxious then you may have a panic attack. Symptoms can include:

- a pounding heart
- sweating or shaking
- feeling sick, faint or dizzy
- feeling unable to breathe properly
- chest or stomach pains
- shaky arms or legs.


How to cope with a panic attack

Panic attacks can feel frightening, but there are ways to help control them. Talking therapies (see pages 47 to 50) can help you manage panic attacks. If you see a counsellor or psychologist, tell them you had a panic attack. They can try to work out how to help you. There are also many self-help resources available. Your doctor or nurse may be able to tell you more about these.

Tell your family and friends that you have had a panic attack, in case it happens again. There are practical ways to manage anxiety, such as breathing exercises and visualisation. See pages 75 to 95 for some useful tips.

If you are having a panic attack, try to:

- stay where you are
- stop the car if you are driving
- tell yourself it is a panic attack and concentrate on the fact that it will be over soon
- breathe slowly and deeply.



'It was hard going through chemo but the mums from my daughter's school texted, called and visited me. They kept me lifted when I was in hospital.'

Waheed

RELATIONSHIPS AND WORK

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Family life

Looking after a family can be hard work, even when you are well. Managing family life and work, as well as coping with cancer, may seem impossible. It can also feel difficult to support other people when you feel you need support yourself.

Be realistic about what you can manage. Try to get help from a partner, your family or your friends, if you can. Think about which duties you can give up for a short time. This may help you concentrate on coping with the cancer.

If you are a parent, you may not be able to do all the things you usually do for your children. This does not mean you have failed in any way. It just means you need to plan your time and save your energy for the most important tasks. If you have children, find things that you can do together, such as going for walks, cooking, or reading stories.

Your family members may also find it difficult to cope with changes to family life. They may be frustrated that they have to do more. They may also feel guilty for feeling that way. They will have fears about the future. Try to create opportunities for you and your family to talk openly. Try to talk about your concerns and how you can support each other.

It may also be helpful to talk to someone outside the family, such as a good friend or trained counsellor.

If you have a partner

Being diagnosed with a serious illness can be difficult for you. But if you have a partner, it can also affect them.

Make time to talk and share your feelings together. This can help you understand each other better and feel closer. If you find it difficult to talk with your partner, seeing a couples counsellor may help.

If you have become less interested in sex because of cancer or its treatment, we have more information about the help available.

We have more information about the impact cancer can have on relationships, and what may help. See page 106 for details.

Talking to children about cancer

Deciding what to tell children about cancer is difficult. It can be hard to know what to tell them, and you may be worried about upsetting them. Children do not always show their feelings, but their behaviour may change at home or at school.

Talking to children about the cancer can:

- help them understand what is going on
- help them feel supported
- prepare them for any changes.

It may also help with some of your own anxiety too. For example, not telling them about hospital appointments may cause extra stress.

How much you tell children will depend on their age and how mature they are. It may be best to start by giving them small amounts of information, and then tell them more when they are ready. Teenagers usually understand what cancer is. Some will want to know more.

Whether they are teenagers or young children, talking about the cancer helps them cope.

Teenagers

It can help to encourage teenagers to ask questions, ask them their opinion and try to give them time to think about what is happening. They may have to, or want to, take on more responsibilities to help – perhaps cooking meals or looking after younger children. This can be hard at a time when they may want more freedom and independence.

Sometimes teenagers may find it hard to talk about a cancer diagnosis. You can encourage them to talk to someone they trust, who can support and listen to them. This might be a grandparent, family friend, teacher or counsellor. They may also find support online. The website riprap.org.uk offers information and support for teenagers who have a parent with cancer.

We have more information about talking to children and teenagers when an adult has cancer (see page 106 for ordering details).

'We were really worried about how to approach the subject with our girls. My Macmillan nurse Maggie helped us with that. She spoke to us about what support resources were available that would make it easier for us and them.'

Waheed



If you live alone

Living alone can add extra stress when you are coping with cancer. You may usually like being independent, but being ill may make you feel lonely and frightened.

It is okay to ask for help. If you can, ask your friends and family. They often want to help.

Some people may find it difficult to support you emotionally, but could help in practical ways. For example, people might be able to help you with shopping or household tasks. You could make a list of practical things that need to be done. If people then offer to help but are not sure what to do, they can choose something from your list. Other people may be comfortable talking with you about how you are feeling. Talking with them helps you share your worries and fears.

You may not have people who you can ask for help. Marie Curie has a free helper service in some parts of the UK. Someone can visit you to have a chat or just be there to listen. Or they can help you get to an appointment, do the shopping or help with household tasks. See page 113 for contact details.

Your GP, social worker, or community nurse can also help. They can tell you what help and support is available from local health, social care and voluntary organisations.

Managing work

For some people, work is an important part of life. If you find work difficult to cope with, you may need to take time off until you feel better. It can help to talk with your employer about the best way to manage this.

It is important to remember that your feelings can affect you when you are at work too. Sometimes it helps to talk to your employer or colleagues about this. This can help them understand what you are dealing with. Let them know what to expect and what you want from them.

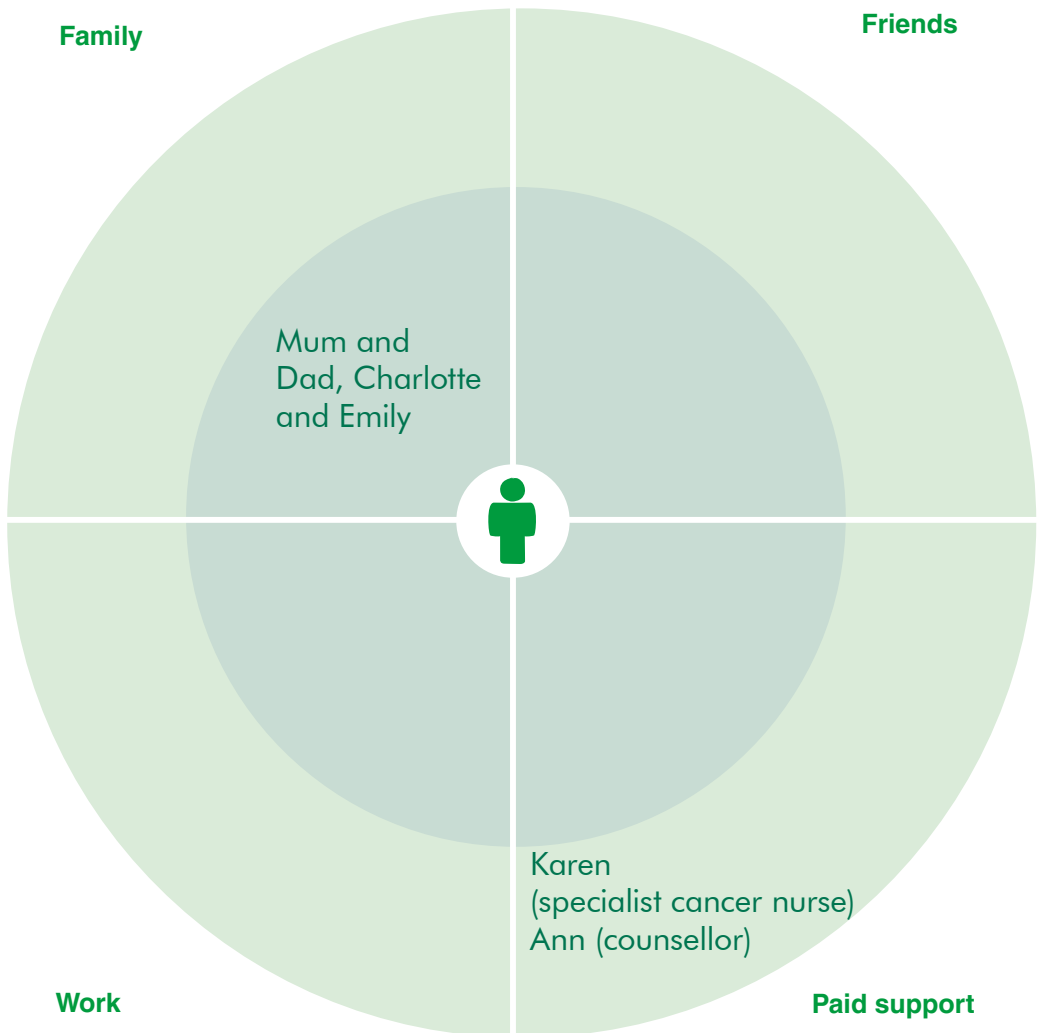
You may prefer not to talk about your treatment or illness at work. You may want to keep this part of your life separate from work. It might be a good way of coping for you.

Going back to work after treatment can feel very different. Your priorities can change. You may want to consider working part-time or returning to work slowly.

We have more information about managing work and talking to your employer or colleagues. See page 106 for details.

Relationship map

You can use our relationship map to help you see more clearly who is important in your life and who can help in different ways. You can write the names of the people you feel are closest to you in the inner circle on the map. The outer circle is for those who care about you and are in your life, but might not be able to offer emotional support.





'I am accepting a new and different lifestyle which is much more relaxed, and I am actually much more in control of it.'

Lizzy

POSITIVE STEPS TO HELP YOURSELF

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Taking control

Learning about the cancer and its treatment can make you feel more in control. It can help you understand your condition and make decisions. It can also help you feel more involved in your care.

Having the right information can help when you speak with your cancer doctor, family, friends or work colleagues. Telling people what you really think and feel helps them understand what is important to you. You may find it helpful to use the thinking tool on page 29.

Some people want a lot of information. Others may only want to know the basic facts and prefer to leave the details to their doctor. Tell your cancer team what you prefer. Everyone has their own ways of coping. It is okay to do what is best for you.

Getting the right information

There is a lot of information available on the internet and in print. Some of this information can be wrong or misleading. There are a lot of incorrect beliefs about cancer and cancer treatment. It is important to get information that comes from a source that you can trust and is up to date.

Ask your specialist nurse or cancer doctor where to find the best information. If you are not sure if something you have read is reliable, check with your nurse or doctor. They are in the best position to answer your questions because they know about your situation.

When you are reading information, look for the Information Standard logo. This means that the information is based on up-to-date evidence and follows strict guidelines.

You can get information from Macmillan. We have information in a range of formats about cancer, cancer treatments and living with cancer (see page 106).

You can also go to a local Macmillan information and support centre to talk to experts and trained volunteers. They can give you support and answer your questions. You can search for groups or cancer information centres near you by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/inyourarea](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/inyourarea)

Changing priorities

Cancer often causes people to think about their lives and their priorities. Some people make big changes to their lives, such as changing their job. Other people start a new hobby. Doing something new and different may help you feel better and more in control.

'A friend suggested I might like to help restore an old boat. It was a chance to get out and I could do as much or as little as I wanted. I have a feeling of achievement and it helped a lot with depression.'

Lizzy

Focusing on your health

During and after cancer treatment, there are things you can do to improve your general health and well-being. This can make you feel more in control of what is happening to you. If you feel that your emotions are building up, focusing on your well-being can help you release the tension.

Looking after your health is important. There are many benefits to being active and eating a healthy diet. It helps reduce the risk of illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes. It also helps reduce the chance of developing some late effects, as certain treatments increase the risk of heart disease or bone problems later in life.

Eat well

Having a healthy, balanced diet is one of the best choices you can make for your overall health. Many people find making a positive change like eating well 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 or get back your strength
- have more energy
- increase your sense of well-being.

There is no evidence that eating a particular diet can cure a cancer. But a healthy, balanced diet can help reduce the risk of new cancers and other diseases, such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

A well-balanced diet should include:

- 5 portions of fresh fruit and vegetables a day
- foods high in fibre, such as beans and cereals
- some protein-rich foods, such as chicken, fish, nuts and pulses (like beans and lentils).

Try to eat less:

- red and processed meat
- salt
- pickled or smoked food.

If you are concerned about your weight, talk to your GP or practice nurse. They can tell you the right weight for your height. They can also give you advice if you need to lose or gain weight.

Our booklets **Healthy eating and cancer** and **Managing your weight after cancer treatment** have more details. See page 106 for details.

Be physically active

When you are living with or after cancer, being physically active can have a positive impact on you. Being active can:

- reduce tiredness and some other treatment side effects
- reduce anxiety and depression
- improve your mood and quality of life
- strengthen your muscles, joints and bones
- improve your heart health
- reduce the risk of other health problems.

At first, you might be nervous about increasing your activity, especially if you have not been active for a while. You may worry that you are too tired, or you may not know where to start. It is important to remember that some exercise is better than none. Physical activity encourages the brain to produce chemicals that improve mood and reduce stress. These are called endorphins. It will also help you feel more in control, because you are doing something positive for yourself.

You could exercise with family or friends. For example, you could all go for regular short walks. Or you could join a cancer rehabilitation programme and exercise with other people. They may understand you and what you are going through. It can also help your mood if you are active outdoors in fresh air and sunshine. You could try gardening or joining a walking group.

A woman with brown hair, wearing a grey and white striped long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans, is walking a small white dog on a red and white patterned leash along a stone path in a lush garden. The path is flanked by green hedges and various plants, including some with autumn-colored leaves. The scene is bright and sunny.

**'Gardening
really does
have so many
benefits both
physically and
mentally.'**

Lara

Get enough sleep

Most people need around 8 hours of good-quality sleep a night.

Cancer can make you worried and anxious. This may affect your sleep. Many people find they stay awake, often worrying about the same thing each night.

There are some things you can do to try and improve your sleep, such as:

- going to bed and getting up at the same time every day
- being physically active during the day
- making sure your bedroom is not too hot, cold, light or noisy
- having a snack before bed
- avoiding drinks that contain caffeine and alcohol in the evening
- not using a mobile phone, tablet or computer or watching television for an hour before bed.

If worry and anxiety are keeping you awake, talking to someone may help. Writing down your worries before going to bed can help clear your mind. Breathing and relaxation exercises may also help reduce anxiety and stress.

Stop smoking

If you smoke, giving up is one of the healthiest choices you can make. Stopping smoking reduces your risk of heart and lung disease, bone thinning (osteoporosis), and smoking-related cancers. It may also reduce the chances of cancer coming back.

The NHS has a lot of information and support to help you give up smoking. Look on the NHS website for the country where you live.

Follow sensible drinking guidelines

NHS guidelines recommend that women and men should:

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

A unit of alcohol is:

- half a pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider
- 1 small glass (125ml) of wine
- a single measure (25ml) of spirits.

Alcohol is linked with an increased risk of some cancers. It can also cause weight gain. Following sensible drinking guidelines is good for your overall health.

There is more information about alcohol and drinking guidelines on the Drinkaware website – visit [drinkaware.co.uk](https://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

Avoid recreational drugs

Recreational drugs can affect your health and relationships. Taking recreational drugs can also change the effect of some of the drugs prescribed by your doctor. Talk to your doctor or nurse if you are worried about this or need support. It is important to be honest with them about using these drugs.

Self-help and support groups

Joining a self-help or support group can have many benefits. They give you a chance to talk to other people. These people may be in a similar situation to you or facing the same challenges. Talking to them can help you feel less alone and more normal. Support groups are a place to share experiences, ask questions and support each other. You may also feel able to discuss the cancer and how it affects you more honestly than you could with friends or family.

Some groups offer support for people with different types of cancer. Other groups are for people with a specific type of cancer. For example, there are breast care groups and laryngectomy groups. Support groups can also help carers, family and friends cope with what is happening. They can learn how to help you and how to take care of themselves. We have more information for carers (see page 106).

Not everyone finds it easy to talk in a group. It may help to go along to see what the group is like and then decide if you want to go back. You might want to take someone you know with you for extra support.

What to expect at a support group

Each cancer support group is different. Some groups are made up of a few people who meet regularly at someone's house. Others are much larger and might have a meeting room.

You can expect a warm welcome from someone who has been in the group for some time. You will be introduced to other members, and have the chance to tell them about yourself. You do not have to talk about anything you do not want to. It can take a few visits before you feel comfortable enough to talk about personal things.

Most groups provide training in listening skills for group leaders. This means they will be able to listen in a positive, caring way. Meetings could include an activity, a social event or a talk from a guest speaker. You may be able to access support services through the group. These might include complementary therapies, counselling or bereavement support. Most groups are free. Some may charge for tea and biscuits, or accept donations for any support services they offer.

Contact the organiser if you have questions about how the group works. They can tell you:

- what to expect
- how big the group is
- common discussion topics and activities.

It may help to go along to see what the group is like before deciding if it is right for you.

How do I find a support group?

You can search for groups in your area by visiting **macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups** or by asking someone from your healthcare team. You can also call our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00**.

Every group is very different. There may be more than one group in your area. You can try different groups to find one that works for you.



Other things you can try

Write down your feelings

Some people find it helps to write down how they are feeling. Keeping a diary, journal or online blog can be a way of expressing how you feel without having to talk about it.

You might want to write down how you are feeling but are not sure where to start. You can try using our good days, bad days tool on the next page. You can use this to write down what makes a good or a bad day for you. We all have days when both good and bad things happen. There is space to write any next steps to help you have more good days. Look at your lists and ask yourself:

- What can I do to have more good days?
- Is there anything I can do to make sure I have fewer bad days?

Writing things down does not work for everybody. Some people, prefer to paint, draw or play music.

'I wrote down achievements and new things tried and accomplished. I began to see that I was improving month on month.'

Lizzy



Good days

I slept well



Bad days

I woke up at 3am and felt tired for the rest of the day

Next steps

Write down my worries before I go to bed.

Release tension

Tension can often be released by talking to people. We have more information about talking and the best ways to do this (see page 106).

Sometimes you may feel like everything is getting too much for you. If you feel this way, it might help to go for a long walk, play music, or hit a pillow or cushion. Crying can also help release emotions. These things will not do anyone any harm and they may make you feel much better.

You could also express yourself through drawing, painting, playing music or another creative hobby.

'Try and revisit what you like doing, not what's expected. I've restored two old hobbies (drawing and knitting) and also started ballroom dancing.'

Tracey

Make time to relax

One way of coping with stress is making time to relax. Doing things you enjoy and being with people you are close to can distract you from the things you are worrying about. It can help you feel more positive. Making time for activities you enjoy can also help you relax. You may want to start a new hobby or try an activity you have always wanted to do.

Try relaxation techniques

There are relaxation techniques you can use to help you relax and cope with stress. These include meditation, yoga, regular physical activity or having a massage.

Some cancer support groups or organisations may offer relaxation, massage, aromatherapy or reflexology. You can ask your cancer doctor or specialist nurse if these are suitable for you. See pages 111 to 114 for details of some useful organisations.

Relaxation exercises can help you learn to relax your breathing or your body. You can find more information on stress and anxiety on the NHS website. You might also find it helpful to visit Anxiety UK's website. There are also many DVDs, CDs, online apps or podcasts you can use at home.

You can ask your GP about relaxation exercises. They may be able to refer you to a healthcare professional who can show you how to do them.

Mindfulness and meditation

Mindfulness is a way of becoming more aware of your thoughts and feelings. It uses techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and yoga to help you focus on what is happening at that time. It can help you change the way you think about things. This can help reduce stress and anxiety. You can search for mindfulness apps online.

Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) uses the techniques of mindfulness with some CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) to help you change how you think. MBCT was developed to support people in chronic pain and has been used in cancer support. MBCT is usually taught as an 8-week course, either in groups or individually. Some centres in the UK offer MBCT classes on the NHS. You can also learn MBCT online at **[bemindfulonline.com](https://www.bemindfulonline.com)**

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) also uses mindfulness. It focuses on accepting what you cannot control or change, while still doing things that will improve your quality of life.

Mindfulness classes are available from:

- the NHS – ask your doctor about what is available in your area or at your hospital
- Mind – courses are available throughout England and Wales. See page 111 for details.
- Buddhist Centres – courses are available in England, Scotland and Wales. Visit thebuddhistcentre.com
- Aware – the national depression charity for Northern Ireland runs courses in mindfulness. Visit aware-ni.org
- Kara – a free web resource, which introduces mindfulness meditation to people with cancer. Visit thisiskara.com
- a private practitioner – search for a certified mindfulness teacher at bemindful.co.uk

You can learn more by visiting mentalhealth.org.uk/publications and choosing 'How to look after your mental health using mindfulness'.

'I found a few meditations on the library website that I downloaded into my MP3 player. I don't use it often, but in times of worry and fear I have found it to be a good soother.'

Eva

Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies are sometimes used alongside medical treatments. Complementary therapies do not claim to cure cancer. People use them to improve their physical or emotional health. They can also be used to relieve symptoms or side effects.

There are many types of complementary therapy, including:

- acupuncture
- aromatherapy
- visualisation
- reflexology.

Always check with your doctor if you are thinking of using a complementary therapy. Some therapies have been scientifically tested to check how effective and safe they are.

Some hospitals, hospices and support groups provide complementary therapies alongside cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Complementary therapies may:

- help you feel better
- help you feel less stressed, tense and anxious
- help you sleep better
- help you feel more in control
- relieve some of your cancer symptoms
- relieve the side effects of your cancer treatment.

Some Macmillan centres offer free complementary therapies to people with cancer. Find your nearest Macmillan centre at [macmillan.org.uk/inyourarea](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/inyourarea)

Using complementary therapies safely

Your cancer doctor or specialist nurse might advise you not to use complementary therapies. This is because it is not safe to have them if you have certain types of cancer or are having certain treatments. Your doctor can give you more information about this. It is very important to tell your cancer doctor if you are thinking about having any complementary or alternative therapy.

Always use a registered therapist and tell them you have cancer. The British Complementary Medicine Association (BCMA) can give you the names of registered therapists. Remember to check the cost of treatment beforehand.

We have more information about complementary therapies (see page 106).

Alternative therapies

Alternative therapies are used instead of conventional medical treatments. But they are not tested in the same way. There is no proof that alternative therapies can cure cancer or slow its growth. Some of these therapies may be harmful.

Doctors usually advise against using these alternative therapies. Talk to your doctor or nurse about this.

Practical tips to help you cope

You may find it difficult to manage your feelings. It can help to take things one day at a time and not look too far ahead. You may find that life gets easier to cope with as time passes. Doing even the smallest tasks may help you feel better:

- if you can, get up and dressed every day
- try to eat well every day
- try to exercise regularly
- try to keep to a regular sleeping pattern
- find some time for yourself every day when you can fully relax
- plan to do things you enjoy, so you have something to look forward to
- set yourself small goals to achieve, and notice what you have done or are grateful for.

You can also ask other people for help:

- accept offers of help and ask people for support
- stay in contact with your family and friends
- recognise when you are feeling run down and stressed, and ask your doctor for advice if you need to
- share your feelings with someone close to you, or with a professional
- if you have eating problems or a poor appetite, talk to your doctor, nurse or a dietitian.

The Mental Health Foundation (see page 111) also has information on how to look after your mental health.



'The Macmillan benefits adviser was so confident and knew exactly how to help. If that service wasn't there, I don't know what I would have done.'

Lara

FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND WORK

Financial help and benefits

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Work

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Financial help and benefits

When you are affected by cancer, you might need help with extra costs. Or you might need financial support if you have to stop working.

Statutory Sick Pay

If you work for an employer and take time off sick, you may be able to get Statutory Sick Pay. Your employer will pay this for up to 28 weeks.

Benefits

Benefits are payments from the government to people who need financial help. You can find out more about benefits and apply for them online. Go to [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) if you live in England, Wales and Scotland or [nidirect.gov.uk](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk) if you live in Northern Ireland.

Here are some benefits that you might be able to get if you are affected by cancer.

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

This benefit is for people under State Pension age who cannot work because of illness or disability. There are different types of ESA:

- Contribution-based ESA may be available if you have paid enough National Insurance.
- Income-related ESA may be available if your income and savings are low, or if you cannot get contribution-based ESA. Income-related ESA is gradually being replaced by a new benefit called Universal Credit.

Personal Independence Payment

This benefit is for people aged between 16 and 64 who have problems moving around and looking after themselves. You must have had these difficulties for at least 3 months and expect them to last for at least 9 months.

Attendance Allowance

This benefit is for people aged 65 or over who have problems looking after themselves because of an illness or disability. This could mean getting out of bed, having a bath or getting dressed. You must have had these problems for at least 6 months.

Special rules

If you are terminally ill, and your doctor thinks you may be expected to live for less than 6 months, you can apply for some benefits using a fast-track process called special rules. Your claim will be dealt with quickly and you will get the benefit you applied for at the highest rate. It does not matter if you live longer than 6 months. Your doctor or specialist nurse will need to fill out a form for you.

Help for carers

Carer's Allowance is a weekly benefit that helps people who look after someone with a lot of care needs. If you do not qualify for it, you can apply for Carer's Credit.

Carer's Credit helps prevent gaps in your National Insurance record if you have to stop working while you are caring for someone else. You do not get money, but it protects your right to a State Pension later in life.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan Grants are small, mostly one-off payments to help people with the extra costs that cancer can cause. They are for people who have a low level of income and savings.

If you need things like extra clothing, help paying heating bills or even a relaxing holiday, you may be able to get a Macmillan Grant.

How much you get will depend on your situation and needs. A grant from Macmillan would not normally affect the benefits you are entitled to. It is an extra bit of help, not a replacement for other support.

Insurance

If you have, or have had, cancer, you may find it hard to get certain types of insurance. This includes life and travel insurance. A cancer diagnosis might also mean that you can get a payout from an insurance scheme that you already have.

If you are looking into buying insurance or making a claim, one of our financial advisers can help. Call **0808 808 00 00**.

We have more information in our booklets **Insurance** and **Travel and cancer** (see page 106). Our Online Community forum Travel insurance may also be helpful. Visit **macmillan.org.uk/travelinsurancegroup**

More information

The benefits system and other types of financial support can be hard to understand. Macmillan has experienced welfare rights advisers and financial guides. You can speak to one by calling the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**.

You can also get information about benefits and other types of financial help from Citizens Advice (see page 114).

Our booklet **Help with the cost of cancer** has lots more information (see page 106).

Work

You may not know how cancer will affect your work, now or in the future.

It is a good idea to talk to your manager early on. If your workplace has a human resources (HR) or personnel department, contact them as soon as you can. If they know how the cancer or treatment may affect your ability to work, they can support you better.

Some people stop working during cancer treatment and for a while after, until they feel ready to go back. Others carry on working, perhaps with reduced hours or other changes to their job.

Some people may decide not to go back to work. Or they may choose to do something different. Others may not be able to go back to work because of the effects of cancer on their health. Going back to work may depend on the type of work you do or how much your income is affected.

It is important not to take on too much, too soon. Your cancer doctor, GP or specialist nurse can help you decide when and if you should go back to work.

Our booklets **Work and cancer**, **Working while caring for someone with cancer** and **Self-employment and cancer** have more information that may be helpful. See page 106 for details of how to order them. There is also lots more information at [macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)

Employment rights

If you have, or have ever had cancer, the law considers you to be disabled. This means you cannot be treated differently (less favourably) than other people at work because of cancer. If you are treated less favourably because of cancer, this is called discrimination.

The law also says your employer has to make reasonable adjustments (changes) to your workplace and their work practices.

If you live in England, Scotland or Wales, you are protected by the Equality Act 2010. If you live in Northern Ireland, you are protected by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Our booklet **Your rights at work when you are affected by cancer** has more information (see page 106).

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT

PELVIC RADIOTHERAPY IN WOMEN



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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**

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** 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

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** 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**

Work support

Our dedicated team of work support advisers can help you understand your rights at work. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a work support adviser (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Macmillan Organiser

This includes a records book to write down information such as appointments, medications and contact details. You can also order a copy from **be.macmillan.org.uk** or by calling **0808 808 00 00**.

Other useful organisations

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

Counselling and emotional support

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Tel 0145 588 3300

Email bacp@bacp.co.uk

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services across the UK. You can search for a qualified counsellor on the website.

LGBT Foundation

Tel 0345 330 3030

(Mon to Fri, 10am to 6pm)

Email info@lgbt.foundation

www.lgbt.foundation

Provides a range of services to the LGBT community, including a helpline, email advice and counselling. The website has information on various topics including sexual health, relationships, mental health, community groups and events.

Mental Health Foundation www.mentalhealth.org.uk/podcasts-and-videos

Provides free well-being podcasts through its website. These include relaxation and mindfulness exercises.

Mind

Helpline 0300 123 3393

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 6pm)

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.

Relate

www.relate.org.uk

Offers a range of services to help with couple and family relationships.

Available face-to-face, by phone and online.

Samaritans

Helpline 116 123

Email jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Provides confidential and non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

UK Council for

Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Tel 0207 014 9955

Email info@ukcp.org.uk

www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Holds the national register of psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors, listing practitioners who meet exacting standards and training requirements.

General cancer support organisations

Cancer Black Care

Tel 0208 961 4151

www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Offers UK-wide information and support for people 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@](mailto:nurseline@cancerfocusni.org)

cancerfocusni.org

www.cancerfocusni.org

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland.

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@](mailto:info@cancersupportscotland.org)

cancersupportscotland.org

www.cancersupportscotland.org

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

Maggie's

Tel 0300 123 1801

Email enquiries@maggies.org

www.maggies.org

Has a network of centres in many 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.

Marie Curie

Helpline 0800 090 2309

(Mon to Fri, 8am to 6pm,
Sat, 11am to 5pm)

www.mariecurie.org.uk

Marie Curie nurses provide free end-of-life care across the UK. They care for people in their own homes or in Marie Curie hospices, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

General health information

Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland

www.hscni.net

Provides information about health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

NHS UK

www.nhs.uk

The UK's biggest health information website. Has service information for England.

NHS Direct Wales

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS health information site for Wales.

NHS Inform

Helpline 0800 224 488

(7 days a week, 8am to 10pm)

www.nhsinform.scot

NHS health information site for Scotland.

Patient UK **www.patient.info**

Provides people in the UK with information about health and disease. Includes evidence-based information leaflets on a wide variety of medical and health topics. Also reviews and links to many health- and illness-related websites.

Cancer registries

The cancer registry

A national database that collects information on cancer diagnoses and treatment. This information helps the NHS and other organisations plan and improve health and care services. There is one in each country in the UK:

National Cancer Registration and Analysis Service

Tel 020 7654 8000

Email enquiries@phe.gov.uk

www.ndrs.nhs.uk

Tel (Ireland) 021 4318 014

www.ncri.ie

Scottish Cancer Registry
**www.ndrs.nhs.uk/cancer-
registration-your-rights-
and-privacy**

Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (WCISU)

Tel 029 2010 4278

**phw.nhs.wales/services-
and-teams/welsh-
cancer-intelligence-and-
surveillance-unit-wcisu/**

Northern Ireland Cancer Registry

Tel 028 9097 6028

Email nicr@qub.ac.uk

www.qub.ac.uk/nicr

Financial or legal advice and information

Advice NI

Helpline 0800 915 4604

Provides advice on a variety of issues including financial, legal, housing and employment issues.

Citizens 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 by contacting:

England

Helpline 0800 144 8848

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Scotland

Helpline 0800 028 1456

www.cas.org.uk

Wales

Helpline 0800 702 2020

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales

YOUR NOTES AND QUESTIONS

A series of horizontal green lines for writing notes and questions, filling the majority of the page below the title.

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 booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by Prof Tim Iveson, Macmillan Chief Medical Editor.

With thanks to: Karen Bowes, Specialist Palliative Care Nurse; Michelle Buono, Education Nurse; Mark Cawley, Lead Nurse Palliative and End of Life Care; Shirley Crofts, Clinical Nurse Specialist and Clinical Psychologist; Christopher Hewitt, Consultant Clinical Psychologist; Elaine Heywood, Macmillan Counsellor; Matt Loveridge, Clinical Nurse Specialist; Annabel Price, Psychiatrist Associate Specialist Director for Palliative Care; Louise Robinson, Clinical Psychologist; Helen Sanderson, Thinkaboutyourlife.org; and Susan Williamson, Senior Research Fellow.

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 have listed a sample of the sources used in the booklet below. If you would like more information about the sources we use, please contact us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

MIND (National Association for Mental Health). Anxiety and panic attacks. 2017. www.mind.org.uk Pdf accessed online February 2018.

MIND (National Association for Mental Health). Wellbeing. 2016. www.mind.org.uk Pdf accessed online February 2018.

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Anxiety disorders. Quality standard QS53. 2014. Accessed online February 2018.

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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Valid from

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Expiry date

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Issue no

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Security 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 about the main emotions that many people with cancer have. This may be after diagnosis, during treatment or after treatment has ended. There is also information for carers, family members and friends.

We hope you find this booklet helpful in dealing with some of the feelings you may have. There are also practical ideas of things you could try that may help you cope.

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.

**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

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Help us improve our information. Scan the QR code below to tell us what you think.

