

What you can do to help yourself

This information is about things you can do to help yourself when you have cancer. Doing things for yourself and becoming involved in your care is called self-management.

If you have any questions, you can ask your doctor or nurse at the hospital. You can also ask your doctor (GP), or the nurse who works in your GP practice. There may also be a local cancer information centre where you can get information and support.

If you have any questions or want someone to talk to, you can call Macmillan Cancer Support on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your own language. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

We have more information in [language] about different cancers, treatments and living with cancer.

Visit [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

In this fact sheet:

- What is self-management?
- How can self-management help me?
- Self-management before treatment
- Self-management during treatment
- Self-management after treatment
- Getting help and support
- Useful organisations
- How Macmillan can help
- More information in [language]

What is self-management?

Self-management means being involved in managing your health. This is important when you have an illness like cancer that can affect your life for many years.

Self-management can help you to know what support is available when you are at home. It can improve your quality of life and help you feel more in control.

Self-management is about:

- understanding what is most important to you
- knowing what you can do about it
- finding out what other help is available and how to get it.

Your healthcare team are your doctors, nurses and other health professionals. They have experience in supporting people with cancer. If you tell them about any problems or worries you have, they can give you the best advice. It is important to tell them if things are improving for you or not.

Self-management helps you work with your healthcare team. Together you can decide what you need and what will help you. This will help you manage your health. You can ask your doctor or nurse about self-management if they have not talked to you about it.

The people looking after you understand that your worries, feelings and wishes may change over time. What was important to you in the beginning may be different to what is important to you later. Some of your symptoms and side effects may change too. Different people may need different support. Tell the people looking after you what is most important to you, so you can get the support you need.

We hope this information gives you some ideas about the different ways that self-management can help you.

How can self-management help me?

Self-management can help you when you are first told you have cancer, during your treatment and after the treatment is finished.

Being involved in your care can help you:

- understand your condition and how it can affect your life
- make helpful changes to your life
- know when you need help and who to get it from
- feel more in control of your life.

Self-management before treatment

When you are first told you have cancer, you will be given information about the cancer and the different treatment options. This can help you:

- understand what is happening
- make decisions
- plan and set goals for the future.

Understanding what is happening

Your healthcare team will tell you about the cancer and what it means. They will explain how it can affect you. They will also tell you about the treatment you can have. You may meet someone called your key worker. This is the person you contact at the hospital if you need to. Your key worker is often a specialist nurse.

Ask as many questions as you need to help you understand. You may want to write down the information, or ask someone else to do this for you, so you can remind yourself later. Your healthcare team may give you some written information. If they do not, you can ask for it.

Many charities have telephone helplines and websites with information. There might be a charity for your type of cancer. There is a lot of information available on the internet. Look for websites that produce good quality information. You can look for information that has the Information Standard logo like the one below and on page 11 of this fact sheet.

Information Standard logo



Making decisions

Being involved in decisions about your care can give you some control. Your healthcare team will talk to you about your treatment options. There might be more than one possible treatment, so you might be asked to choose between them. They will support you to make any decisions. Together, you can plan for your care and treatment that is right for you. Having information will help you make these decisions.

Planning and setting goals

Some people find it helpful to think about what they want to achieve (goals). Goals can be small and easy to reach, or they can be big things you want to do.

Think about something you want to change as you start treatment.

You may want to:

- make your diet healthier and eat more fresh fruit and vegetables
- find someone to help you at home during treatment
- cut down or stop smoking.

Set goals you think you can achieve, not things you will find too difficult.

Once you have decided on a goal, you can plan how to reach it.

Ask yourself:

- what you want to do
- when you are going to do it
- what reward you will get from achieving it.

As you achieve small goals, you can set more difficult ones. There may be something you think will be hard but you want to do it. You could ask your doctor, nurse, family or friends for support.

Not all plans go smoothly. It helps to think about what you will do and how you will cope if things do not go well.

If you are finding it hard to achieve your goals, you may want to change them or think again about how you can reach them.

You can set goals for your appointments with your healthcare team. Before the appointment, think about what you want to talk about. For example:

- get practical tips on coping with a side effect
- ask what financial support is available.

This can help you get the most from your appointment. Writing notes before the appointment can help you remember what you want to ask.

Self-management during treatment

There are lots of ways to get involved during your treatment.

- Going to appointments and taking your medicines.
- Being aware of the possible side effects of treatment, and telling your healthcare team about any that you experience.
- Identifying any issues or worries that you would like to talk about with your doctor or nurse.
- Following the advice that your healthcare team gives you.

Going to appointments and taking medicines

Your healthcare team usually gives you a plan that says when you will have your treatment. It is important not to miss these appointments. The treatment is planned so it can be as effective as possible.

If you find it hard to get to your appointments, tell your doctor or nurse. There are things they can do to help.

Always take any medicines you are given exactly as you have been told to. This is so they can work as well as possible. If you do not understand something about your treatment or when to take your medicines, tell your doctor or nurse. It is very important to take medicines in the right way.

Some people may have some of their treatment at home, for example chemotherapy tablets. If you are taking tablets at home and start to feel unwell, contact the hospital for advice. It is important to check whether you should continue taking them while you feel unwell.

Side effects of treatment

You may get side effects from your treatment. Side effects are unwanted effects of cancer treatment, such as feeling sick or tired. It is important to tell your doctors and nurses about any side effects you have. Contact the hospital for advice if you have any side effects.

It might help to write a list of any side effects you have. You could write down when they happen and how they affect you. This will be helpful in your appointments and remind you what to say.

Your doctors and nurses can give you advice on the best way to manage any side effects. You can often have medicines to help. You should take the medicines exactly as you are told to.

We have information in [language] about common side effects of cancer treatments.

Before trying a new way of managing a side effect, check with your doctor or nurse.

Following advice

Your healthcare team will give you advice during your treatment.

For example, they may tell you:

- to avoid certain foods because they affect your treatment
- how to manage side effects
- to stop smoking
- to do certain exercises after surgery.

When your healthcare team gives you advice, they should explain how it will help you. If you are not sure why they have suggested something, ask them to explain it.

Advice from your healthcare team is based on their experience in caring for people with cancer. This means they will not suggest things that are not likely to be helpful. But it is your choice whether you follow their advice. If you find it difficult or if you need help, talk to the person who gave you the advice. You can work together to find different solutions.

Self-management after treatment

Adjusting to life after treatment is sometimes hard. You may feel happy that treatment has finished. Sometimes people can feel a bit uncertain about the future. At first, some people find that because they are having less hospital visits, they feel less supported. But knowing what support is available can help.

Being involved in your healthcare can help you feel more in control. It can help you:

- adjust to life after treatment
- make positive changes to improve your health
- manage any side effects of treatment
- know the symptoms of any late effects of treatment
- know about possible signs that the cancer has come back.

Adjusting to life after treatment

As you come to the end of treatment, your nurse or doctor will ask you how you are feeling. They will explain how you are likely to feel over the next few months. And they will talk to you about any side effects you may get. Make sure you mention any worries you have, so you can find out what you can do about them when you are at home.

You may be given a treatment summary. This explains what treatment you have had and what to expect now. It explains what symptoms to look out for and who to contact if you have any problems. The summary also tells you about any tests you may need in the future and the dates of follow-up appointments.

It is important to know who to contact if you are worried about your health. Your healthcare team should tell you who will be your main contact and how to reach them. They are often called your key worker. It is often your nurse at the hospital.

You may find it useful to get some emotional support to help you adjust to life after cancer. Ask your nurse if there is someone you can talk to, such as a counsellor.

Ongoing side effects

Most side effects begin to get better after treatment ends. Some side effects can last longer. Sometimes, they can become permanent or long-term.

You should be told about any side effects that could become long-term. Always tell your cancer doctor or nurse if you get a new side effect. Or if the ones you have are not getting better. For example, tiredness, eating problems, sexual problems, bladder and bowel problems, or pain.

Although you might find some of these difficult to talk about, you and your doctor or nurse can work together to find the best way to manage your side effects. Your doctor can refer you to other specialists for more help, if needed.

These can include different doctors and nurses who are experts in problems or certain areas of the body. A dietitian can help with weight problems. Or a physiotherapist can help with difficulty moving or pain in a part of the body. There are many other types of help. Your doctor will know who you need, depending on what problem you have.

We have more information in [language] about managing side effects.

Lifestyle changes

A healthy lifestyle can help you recover faster and improve how you feel.

You could:

- stop smoking
- be more physically active
- eat a healthy diet and keep to a healthy weight
- drink less alcohol
- learn how to reduce stress, sleep well, and relax more.

We can give you more information about these things. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** and tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

You can also get information from your doctor (GP), hospital team, pharmacy, community centre or leisure centre.

Worrying about the future

You may worry about the cancer returning. Or you may worry about side effects caused by the treatment. Talk to your healthcare team about your worries. They can tell you what signs to look out for and what you can do. This can help you feel more in control. They can also suggest ways of coping with your worries.

Getting help and support

Cancer can affect other parts of your life, such as your work, relationships and finances.

There is lots of support available, depending on the problem. You can call Macmillan on **0808 808 00 00** for information on any of these issues. We can tell you who else to contact.

You could also contact your hospital team, doctor (GP) or local council for advice.

Ask your family and friends for support if you can. Many people find it difficult asking for and accepting help. But usually family and friends want to help, they might just not know how. Being honest about what you need is the best way to get the right support. People could help you by:

- making meals
- cleaning your house
- taking you to hospital appointments
- talking to you about how you are feeling.

You can get confidential advice and support from many different people and organisations, including:

- Macmillan Cancer Support (page 9)
- your local cancer support centre (often in your hospital)
- your hospital
- your workplace
- Citizens Advice.

Some people also find it can help to get involved in their local community.

You could become a volunteer or support others who are going through a similar situation to you.

Learning about self-management

This may be the first time you have been told about self-management. You may not feel very confident managing your healthcare and may want some support and help.

Your doctor or nurse can help you with self-management. Some hospitals have education days or clinics to help people with recovery after cancer. They can show you ways to manage your health better. Some cancer charities and support groups may also run free training courses.

Macmillan offers a range of courses and workshops to help you with your recovery. The HOPE (Helping to Overcome Problems Effectively) course is a free, short course that looks at ways to manage the impact of cancer on your life. Talk to your nurse about what courses are available in your area.

Useful organisations

Citizens Advice

Provides advice on financial, legal, housing and employment issues. Find details for your local office in the phone book or on one of the following websites:

England and Wales

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Scotland

www.cas.org.uk

Northern Ireland

www.citizensadvice.co.uk

You can also find advice online in a range of languages at **adviceguide.org.uk**

Self Management UK

Tel 03333 445 840

Email hello@selfmanagementuk.org

www.selfmanagementuk.org

Delivers a range of self-management courses for people with long-term conditions

How Macmillan can help

Macmillan is here to help you and your family. You can get support from:

- **The Macmillan Support Line (0808 808 00 00).** We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your language. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use. We can answer medical questions, give you information about financial support, or talk to you about your feelings. The phone line is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.
- **The Macmillan website (macmillan.org.uk).** Our website has lots of English information about cancer and living with cancer. There is more information in other languages at macmillan.org.uk/translations
- **Information centres.** At an information centre, you can talk to a cancer support specialist and get written information. Find your nearest centre at macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres or call us. Your hospital might have a centre.
- **Local support groups** – Find a group near you at macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups or call us.
- **Macmillan Online Community** – You can talk to other people in similar situations at macmillan.org.uk/community

More information in [language]

We have information in [language] about these topics:

<p>Types of cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breast cancer• Bowel cancer• Lung cancer• Prostate cancer <p>Treatments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chemotherapy• Radiotherapy• Surgery	<p>Coping with cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you're diagnosed with cancer – A quick guide• Financial support - benefits• Eating problems and cancer• End of life• Healthy eating• Tiredness (fatigue) and cancer• Side effects of cancer treatment• What you can do to help yourself
---	--

To see this information, go to macmillan.org.uk/translations

Speak to us in [language]

You can call Macmillan free on **0808 808 00 00** and speak to us in your own language through an interpreter. You can talk to us about your worries and medical questions. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

References and thanks

All of this information has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team.

This content has been reviewed by relevant experts. It has been approved by our Chief Medical Editor, Dr Tim Iveson, Macmillan Consultant Medical Oncologist.

With thanks to: Louise Smith, Macmillan Survivorship Lead for East and West Suffolk and Debbie Provan, National Macmillan AHP Lead for Cancer Rehabilitation. Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition.

All our information is based on the best evidence available. For more information about the sources we use, please contact us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

MAC14365



Content reviewed: September 2017

Next planned review: 2020

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate but it should not be relied upon to reflect the current state of medical research, which is constantly changing. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult your doctor. Macmillan cannot accept liability for any loss or damage resulting from any inaccuracy in this information or third-party information such as information on websites to which we link.

© Macmillan Cancer Support 2017. Registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Registered office 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ.