

My appearance

Cancer and its treatments can change your body and how you feel about it. Because of this, body image concerns are common in people affected by cancer. Changes to your body may be temporary or permanent. They may include changes such as:

- hair loss
- scarring from surgery
- losing part of your body such as a breast or limb
- changes in the way you speak, eat, or breathe
- losing or gaining weight
- skin changes such as rashes
- swelling of an arm, leg or other part of the body ([lymphoedema](#)).

Body image concerns may begin before, during or after treatment. You may feel more self-conscious but find it manageable. Or you might think about your concerns a lot of the time. It is normal to feel less confident, anxious, worried or sad.

Talking with people close to you about how you feel can be helpful. This could be your family, close friends, cancer doctor or specialist nurse. There are different types of support to help you cope.

Tips for dealing with changes to your appearance

- It takes time to get used to body changes. Try to allow yourself time and be kind to yourself. Take time regularly to do nice things such as having a relaxing bath or spending time somewhere you find peaceful.
- Before treatment, your cancer doctor and nurse will give you information to prepare you. They will tell you how the treatment is likely to affect you and any possible side effects. They can also suggest things that may help.
- The look and feel of scars usually improve in the months after surgery. You can use skin camouflage make-up to help make a scar less noticeable.
- If you are thinking about [wearing a wig](#), ask your nurse about this as soon as you can. This means there is time to match the wig as closely as possible to your own hair. If you want to cover up hair loss, other options include hats, scarves or turbans.
- You may want to talk to a [Boots Macmillan Beauty Advisor](#). These advisors give you advice about caring for your hair, [skin and nails](#) during treatment.
- [Look Good Feel Better](#) runs hair and beauty workshops for people affected by cancer and has a programme specifically to support men.
- If you have a visible body change such as a scar or [stoma](#), try to look at it as soon as you can. Delaying this often makes it more difficult to accept the change. You may want to ask others for support when you look at it for the first time or you may choose to do it on your own.
- Reconstruction surgery, such as [breast reconstruction](#), may help you feel more confident. It can be done immediately or years later. Your cancer doctor or nurse will talk to you about this.
- If you wear any type of prosthesis (false body part) and do not feel confident, talk to your nurse or doctor. They can arrange for you to be reassessed and there may be new, improved types available.
- High V-neck shirts help if you want to cover a scar or central line in the chest area. Bell-shaped sleeves are good if you have a swollen arm. If you've had surgery to the tummy area, have swollen legs or have put on weight, trousers with a drawstring or elasticated waist, or flat-front trousers are good.
- If your body image concerns are difficult to cope with, talk to your doctor or nurse. Tell them if you feel [anxious](#) or upset a lot of the time. Your doctor or nurse can refer you to a psychologist or counsellor trained in a type of talking therapy called cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Body image and cancer](#)
- [Feel more like you](#)
- [Coping with hair loss](#)
- [Side effects of cancer treatment](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

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 where you can [chat to us online](#).

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

Other useful contact details

- Look Good Feel Better – visit www.lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk or call 01372 747 500
- Changing Faces – visit www.changingfaces.org.uk or call 0300 012 0275
- British Association of Skin Camouflage – visit www.skin-camouflage.net or call 01254 703 107

Notes and questions
