

Relationship with your partner

This information is about managing your relationship with your partner. Being diagnosed with a serious illness can be difficult for you. But if you have a partner, it can also affect them. Cancer and its treatment can put a lot of strain on relationships. Even couples who have been together for a long time can have problems. However, some changes will be positive. Going through an experience like cancer can make relationships stronger.

How a relationship changes can depend on what the relationship was like before, how treatment has changed your daily life and each person's personality.

Some couples find their relationship changes after cancer and its treatment. These changes may be practical, emotional or physical.

- Practical – your roles and responsibilities at home and work may be different now. For example, you may have new ways of managing housework, childcare or finances.
- Emotional – your feelings about each other may change. Your relationship may be stronger or more complicated.
- Physical – you may be coping with side effects or physical changes after treatment. Having sex or how you both feel about sex may be different. Some cancer treatments can affect your fertility. This might change any plans to have children.

You may be facing challenges as a couple that you did not expect. Every couple copes with these in their own way. Think about how you have coped with challenges in the past. It usually helps to be open and honest with each other about how you feel.

Tips for managing your relationship

- Talk to each other about how you feel and what is important to you. This can help you understand each other better and feel closer. If you find it difficult to talk, seeing a couples counsellor may help.
- Be aware that you may both have many difficult feelings and that these are all normal.
- Make time for each other. Do things you enjoy and talk about things other than cancer.
- Work out how you cope as a couple. Some people find that after laughing or crying together, there is less tension.
- Ask for support and accept help from friends and family members.
- Try to keep to a routine. This can help life feel more normal.
- You might try to protect your partner by not being honest about your fears and concerns. But talking about your feelings may make it easier for your partner to be honest about theirs.
- Remember that there may be times when you or your partner may want some time on your own to sort out thoughts and feelings. Be open with your partner about this.
- Often partners will dismiss their own problems. You can help by encouraging them to get help if you think they may be struggling.
- Let your partner know how they can support you. They may want to do more but they may be unsure how to help.
- If you do not feel like being intimate, hugging and holding hands can help you feel close.

Local resources:

Resource	Contact details

National resources:

Resource	Contact details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relate • British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • www.relate.org.uk Tel: 0300 100 1234 • www.bacp.co.uk Tel: 0145 588 3300

Further information

www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/relationships/you-and-your-partner

Our booklets and leaflets are available to order free on be.macmillan.org.uk

- Cancer and relationships
- Talking with someone who has cancer

More information and 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

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.

We produce information in a range of formats and languages. To order these visit macmillan.org.uk/otherformats or call our support line.