

# Talking about cancer



# About this booklet

This booklet is about talking about cancer. It is for anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer.

The booklet explains:

- the benefits of talking about cancer
- how to cope if you find the conversations difficult
- how to deal with other people's reactions.

It also has practical tips for talking and asking for support.

We hope it helps you deal with some of the questions or feelings you may have.

This booklet does not have information for the family or friends of people with cancer. The following booklets could be helpful:

- [Talking with someone who has cancer](#)
- [Talking to children and teenagers when an adult has cancer.](#)

## 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](#) to help you.

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

At the [end of the booklet](#), there are details of other organisations that can help. There is also [space to write down questions and notes](#) for your doctor or nurse.

## Quotes

In this booklet, we have included quotes from people who have had cancer, which you may find helpful. These are from people who have chosen to share their story with us. To share your experience, visit [macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://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](tel:08088080000), 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://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 Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, easy read, Braille, large print, interactive PDFs and translations. To order these, visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000).

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# Talking about a cancer diagnosis

Telling your friends or family that you have cancer can be difficult. But if people you care about know, they can support you and help you feel less alone.

## Why talking can help

You may find it upsetting or uncomfortable to talk about a cancer diagnosis. Or it may take you some time to be ready to talk about your diagnosis. But it is important to think about who needs to know and the best way to talk to them about it.

This can help you get the support you need at home, at work and from your healthcare team. It can also help you to make decisions that are right for you.

Many people do not like talking about their own needs. You might be worried about upsetting someone. Or you might think people will think of you as demanding. But it is okay and important to talk to others. There are often relatives, friends or neighbours who want to help. Try starting a conversation and saying what you need, even if it is just for them to listen. Asking someone for their support shows you value them.

Sometimes you might have to tell other people about the cancer. For example, this might be your dentist or a travel company. Remember, these professionals are there to help you. You might want to take someone with you to appointments, or have them with you while you make a phone call.

We have practical tips for how to tell people you have cancer.

We have information about talking to:

- a partner
- children
- people at work.



# The benefits of talking

Talking can help if you feel worried or uncertain about things. It can help you get support and give you some control over your situation.

## Understand how you are feeling and why

Saying things out loud will often help you understand what you are feeling and why.

## Help you feel that your feelings are normal

You may have lots of different emotions. Having someone listen to you without judgement may reassure you that what you are feeling is normal.

## Feel more in control

Talking about any problems can make you feel more confident about dealing with them. It may also make you feel better about having hard conversations.

## **Make important decisions**

Sometimes you may have to make decisions that affect others. You may think you know what other people are thinking or feeling but sometimes they surprise you. Talking to them can help you make tough decisions.

## **Feel more supported and less anxious**

If you feel someone else understands, cares and supports you, it can help you feel less alone.

## **Feel closer to your family or friends**

Talking with people you care about, and including them in important decisions, often makes them feel valued.

# Who can you talk to?

Think about who you usually talk with about important issues or difficult problems. This is probably the best person to talk to.

This may be a:

- partner
- close friend
- family member
- work colleague
- counsellor
- religious leader.

You may choose somebody who has been through a similar experience.

**“Dad discussed his worries with his Macmillan nurse. She brought the imam to talk to him. This was a great burden lifted from the family. It wouldn’t have happened without Macmillan’s relationship with the imam and the mosque. ”**

Suad, who cared for her father

## Family, friends or people you work with

Some people have close family or friends who can support them. Or they may have close relationships with people they work with. But even with supportive people around you, it may be hard to talk about cancer. You may feel isolated.

We have tips on telling family or friends about the cancer and asking for support. We also have information about [talking about cancer at work](#).

Some people do not feel as close to family or friends, or these people may live far away. They may work alone or not be close to people they work with. If you are in this situation, you may feel there is no one to talk to.

Sometimes it is easier to talk with someone you do not know. You may feel less pressure to act a certain way. You may also feel safe knowing that they will not share the conversation with your friends or family. If you feel this way, help is available.

## Find other sources of support

Some people may not be able to support you in the way you would like. They may need more time to deal with their own feelings. However, you can find other sources of support. You could:

- talk to another relative, friend or colleague
- call the Macmillan Support Line on [0808 808 00 00](#)
- join a support group
- ask your GP about talking therapy
- get support online – for example, on our [Online Community](#).

## Macmillan Support Line

You can contact the Macmillan Support Line 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. You can talk about a cancer diagnosis and treatment, discuss money worries, get guidance about work, or just have someone listen to you.

Our support line is made up of specialist teams who can help you with:

- emotional and practical support if you or someone you know has been diagnosed with cancer
- clinical information from our specialist nurses about things like diagnosis and treatments
- welfare rights advice, for information about benefits and general money worries.

## Other support lines

If you need to talk to someone when our support line is closed, you can contact any of the following 24-hour services.

For medical help or advice:

- In England, call NHS 111 on **111**.
- In Scotland, call NHS 24 on **111**.
- In Wales, call NHS 111 Wales on **111**.
- In [Northern Ireland](#), it varies by region.

For emotional support, it is free to call [Samaritans](#) (UK-wide) on **116 123**.

## Support groups

It may help to join a [support group](#). They are sometimes called self-help groups. You can talk with other people who may be going through the same thing and facing the same challenges. It can be a place to share experiences, ask questions and support each other. It may be easier to talk about the cancer and how it affects you more openly than you can with family or friends.

Some groups offer support for people with any type of cancer. Other groups are for people with a specific type of cancer. For example, there are breast care groups and laryngectomy groups. These groups can also help family or friends cope with what is happening. They can learn how to help you and how to take care of themselves.

Not everyone finds it easy to talk in a group. It may help to go and experience what the group is like before deciding if it is right for you. You might want to take someone you know with you for extra support.

## **What happens at a support group?**

Every cancer support group is different. Some groups have a few people and may meet at someone's house. Others are much bigger and might have a meeting room. Or they may meet online.

You will usually be welcomed by someone who has been in the group for some time. They will introduce you to other members and you can 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.

Some group leaders are trained in listening skills. They can 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 get information about support services from the group, including 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.

If you have questions about how a group works, contact the organiser. They can tell you:

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

## How do you find a support group?

You can search online for cancer support groups in your area. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/localsupportgroups](https://macmillan.org.uk/localsupportgroups) Or you can ask someone from your healthcare team. You can also call our cancer support specialists on [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000) for more information.

Every group is very different. If there are several [groups in your area](#), you could go to a few and find out which one is best for you.

**“ My Macmillan nurse encouraged me to join a support group. There aren't any support groups in Nigeria so it's not something I'm used to. But after I started going, I wanted to find a support group for Africans, to meet people in my position. ”**

Della, diagnosed with breast cancer



## Counselling

Counselling is a type of talking therapy. A trained counsellor will listen to you and support you. Counsellors do not usually give advice or tell you what to do. But they can give you space to talk about your concerns. A counsellor 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 could have:

- 1 session of counselling
- a short course of sessions over a few weeks or months
- a longer course that lasts for several months or years.

You can have counselling:

- face to face
- in a group
- over the phone
- by email
- online through live web or video 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. You are more likely to need to pay if you meet with a counsellor long-term.

You can call the Macmillan Support Line on [0808 808 00 00](tel:0808 808 00 00) for more information about finding a counsellor. Or you can contact the [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy](#).

## Online support

If you use the internet, you could join an online support group or chat room. You might find:

- groups where people talk about different types of cancer
- more general groups where people chat about practical and emotional issues
- groups for carers, relatives and friends.

You can share your thoughts and feelings by posting messages online for others to read and reply to. Or you can just read other people's comments or posts. These messages can sometimes be helpful. They can also be sad and hard to read. It may help to know other people feel like you do. You may feel less alone and learn how other people cope with having cancer.

Online support might be helpful for you if you find it hard to talk face to face. Online groups are also easy to leave. You do not need to say why you are leaving.

Our [Online Community](#) offers this type of support. It is quick and easy to join. You can talk to people on our forums, blog about your experiences, make friends and join support groups.

# Things that make it hard to talk

Some people or communities think cancer should not be talked about. But talking about cancer is now more widely accepted. People talk about it in magazines, on TV and online. They also talk about it with friends or family.

Talking about cancer can still be hard. You may feel like your whole life has changed if you have cancer. It can have a big effect on your emotions, as well as on other parts of your life.

At first, talking about cancer might make it feel very real. You might be afraid that talking will upset you. But it is okay to cry or shout. You might also feel embarrassed talking about your health. Before you talk to other people, think about how you feel and what you want to say. Writing down your thoughts first may help.

Your family or friends may also find it hard to talk about the cancer, because they find it hard to accept. Some people have never had a serious illness or known anyone who has. They may be unsure of what you need or how to talk to you. Often, people cope by using humour to talk about cancer, even if this seems insensitive.

People might want to tell you about their own experiences of cancer, or the experiences of people they know. This might help, or you might find it annoying or upsetting. It is okay to feel this way.

You may be afraid of losing your job or being treated differently at work. Or you may feel your healthcare team are too busy to talk about your feelings. We have information about [talking to your employer](#) and [talking to your healthcare team](#).

You may live alone or have no one nearby to talk to. We have information about connecting with other people if you feel lonely or isolated in our booklet [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#). Do not feel there is a 'right' way to talk about cancer. Talking can be hard. You do not need to put any pressure on yourself to have a conversation.

**“ As a community, we’re so worried about what others think, the effect on the person isn’t considered. But that wasn’t me, I didn’t want to hide my diagnosis. I didn’t care what others thought. I hadn’t done anything wrong, so why should I suffer alone? ”**

Kirendeeep, diagnosed with breast cancer

# If you do not want to talk

Some people do not want to talk about their thoughts or feelings, or about the cancer and its treatment. They would rather just get on with life. They may find that they cope better if they do normal, everyday things and do not talk about the cancer.

If you do not feel ready to talk, you could practise what to say when people ask how you are. For example, you could say, 'Thank you for asking how I am. I'll let you know when I feel ready to talk.'

But not talking about cancer can cause problems. It may become hard to make decisions about treatment or work. This can delay the start of your treatment or cause problems with money or relationships.

**“ Instead of dealing with what I was feeling, I dismissed my fear and said, ‘I’m fine, it’s good, everything will be okay.’ I just kept going so everybody else wouldn’t feel awkward. But I reached the stage where I couldn’t do this any more. ”**

Debra, diagnosed with rectal cancer

# If the cancer cannot be cured

People who have a terminal illness sometimes feel they have to be strong and support other people. They feel they have to start the hard conversations, even though they are the one who is ill. But if you are unwell or feeling low, it can be very hard to do this.

Try telling people how you feel and what would help. This way, your family or friends will learn how they can support you. You can choose the people you want to talk to and who you feel will be able to help you. You can plan when you want to talk to them and what you want to say.

Sometimes it can help to talk to someone outside your own family or friends. This could be a counsellor or a [support organisation](#). [Marie Curie](#) also has information about having difficult conversations.



# Talking with people close to you

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# Talking about your diagnosis

Telling family or friends that you have cancer can be hard. You may worry about how they will react. Or you may feel guilty about the impact of the cancer and its treatment on others.

Although you may feel alone at this time, it is important to remember your diagnosis also affects your family and friends.

They will be worried about you because you are important to them. They may also worry about the changes you may have to make to your working life or education, and your finances.

If you have told family or friends that you have been for tests, they might be waiting to hear the results. You may feel forced into talking about the cancer before you are ready.

It can help to tell your family or friends that you need some time to think about the diagnosis before you are ready to talk about it.

## Taking someone to hospital appointments

You may want to ask a partner, family member or friend to go to hospital appointments with you. You might find having someone with you helps when talking to your healthcare team. Having someone with you can:

- make you feel supported and cared for
- give you both a chance to ask the doctor questions.

Before an appointment, it can help to think about any questions you have. You might want to write them down. Sometimes you might find it hard to ask your healthcare team the right questions, or remember their answers. If [someone comes with you](#), they can help you remember what was said, or take notes for you. You can also ask them to help you tell other people.

## How to tell people you have cancer

You may find it easier to tell people you are close to about the cancer first. It is also important to [tell any children you have](#). Depending on how old they are, you might need to prepare more for this conversation.

Before you start telling people, you could do the following:

- Make a list of who you want to talk to.
- Think about how much you want to share the first time you talk with someone. You can say you need a break and will talk more at a later time.
- Try to pick a place and time that will be quiet.
- Write down any questions they ask that you cannot answer, so you can ask your healthcare team.

We have [practical tips for how to tell people you have cancer](#).

**“ We didn’t treat it as a secret,  
as we wanted all of us to be able  
to discuss our concerns openly. ”**

Sean, diagnosed with bowel cancer

## Dealing with people's reactions

People have [different reactions](#) when you tell them you have cancer. This may be because of experiences they have had. But it can also be about how they cope with change.

Some people will be keen to support you. They may even want to talk about things before you are ready.

The news may make some people uncomfortable. Some family members or friends may say nothing. This could be because they are afraid of saying the wrong thing. Or it may be because they are not comfortable talking about illness or cancer. You may have to start talking about the subject yourself.

It can help to think about why someone may not react as you expect.

### Lack of experience

Some people may have no experience of talking to or supporting someone with cancer. They may not know what you need or be too embarrassed to ask. You may have to talk about it first.

### Worry about your reaction

People may worry about how you will react if they start talking about cancer. They may be scared of upsetting you. If you feel able to talk about what is happening and how you feel, it might be easier to get support.

## Sharing stories

Many people know someone who has had cancer. Some people may share stories that you find upsetting. It is okay to tell them you do not want to hear that kind of story right now.

## Avoidance

People may not know what to say. They may avoid you or not say much. Other people may only talk about things they think are helpful and positive. If you need to talk about your fears, this may be frustrating.

**“ I was reluctant to talk about it. In India, it’s not something people talk about freely. Everything is kept very hush hush. It’s not just cancer - it’s the same with a lot of things, like mental illness. Hopefully things are changing and there is support out there for cancer patients and families. ”**

Susmita, diagnosed with breast cancer

## Denial

You may find that other people go into denial. They may cope with the situation by pretending that it is not happening. This can be upsetting when you need their support.

We have [more advice about dealing with people's reactions to cancer](#).

Visit [healthtalk.org](http://healthtalk.org) to watch videos of people talking about their cancer experiences and how they coped with other people's reactions.

Your family or friends may find our booklet [Talking with someone who has cancer](#) useful.

They could also visit our [Online Community](#). It has a group for family and friends to share experiences and feelings, or to get support from other people with similar experiences.

# How to tell people you have cancer

Telling family or friends about the cancer can help them support you.

## Telling people about cancer

You may not want to talk about the cancer, but your family and friends may want to. If this happens, try to be open and honest with them. Let them know it is hard for you to talk. You could tell them you might not feel able to share everything.

If family or friends want to talk about the cancer when you do not, it can cause problems. We have [tips on dealing with these problems in relationships](#).

Only you can decide how much you want to talk about your diagnosis or treatment. For example, if you are going out with friends, you could tell them you would rather not talk about cancer today. Or you could say you will talk about it when you feel able to.

We have more information about dealing with difficult feelings in our booklet [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#). We also have advice for family and friends in our booklet [Talking with someone who has cancer](#).

You can order our booklets and leaflets for free.

Visit [orders.macmillan.org.uk](https://orders.macmillan.org.uk) or call [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000).



The following tips can help make conversations easier.

## **Tell them in the way that feels best for you**

Talking face to face can be difficult, especially if the other person lives far away. You may find it easier to give the news:

- over the phone
- in a letter
- by text or email.

## **Introduce the subject gradually**

Do this in a way that feels right for you. If you are not sure how to start, you could say something like this:

- 'This is going to be difficult, but I need to tell you something.'
- 'You know I have been feeling unwell for a while. I have had some tests and they have found out what's wrong.'

## **Ask what they already know**

This can stop you repeating information.

## **Think about what is most important to you**

You may feel as though there are a lot of things to think about. But if you focus, you might find that there are only 2 or 3 things that you really want to talk about.

Try to tell the person the main things you are worried about. You could start by saying something general, such as, 'I'm worried about how things are at the moment.' And then you can go into more detail.



## **Give the information slowly**

Say a few sentences and check the other person understands what you are saying before you carry on. You can ask questions such as, 'Does that make sense?' Asking the other person if they understand may help you feel listened to.

## **Tell them how you feel**

You may want to sound positive and cheerful to make your family member or friend feel better. If you are not feeling too worried about your situation, this is fine. But it is important they know if you are worried, so they can support you.

## **Do not worry about silences**

Sometimes you or the person you are talking to may not know what to say. Holding hands, hugging or just sitting quietly together for a while may help.

If you find a silence is uncomfortable, you could ask a simple question such as, 'What are you thinking about?'

## **Be open**

It is better for your family and friends to know the facts about the cancer from the start. If they find out later, they may feel hurt and upset that they have not been able to support you.

If you are not sure how well your treatment will work, you may want to talk about this with your family or friends. This will help them support you better.

## **Ask for help to tell other people**

Telling people about the cancer diagnosis can be tiring. You can ask someone you trust to tell other people for you. You can tell them what information you want them to share.

## **It is okay not to talk about cancer**

You may not want to discuss serious issues all the time. Just chatting about everyday things can also help you feel that normal life still goes on.

## **Accept and ask for help**

Family or friends will often offer their support. If you cannot think of anything at that time, you can thank them and tell them you may ask them later.

If they do not offer support and you would like some, ask them for it. Use the tips above to help you ask for support.

You can use the tool on the next page to write down what support you need. If you think you need support, this could help you start a conversation with people close to you.

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# Cancer diagnosis and relationships

Cancer can affect your relationships and sex life. Whether you have a partner or are single, talking can help.

## If you have a partner

For any couple, talking about issues such as money, work or childcare is important. This is even more important after a cancer diagnosis.

How a cancer diagnosis affects your relationship may depend on:

- how long you have been together
- whether you live with your partner
- how long you have had cancer
- how cancer affects your daily life
- how well you and your partner understand the changes you are going through.

We have information to help you with any practical issues you and your partner may face when preparing for treatment.

Visit [macmillan.org.uk/prepare-treatment](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/prepare-treatment)

## **Tips for talking to your partner**

It can be hard to know how to start a conversation about cancer with your partner. But these tips may help you.

### **Let your partner know how they can support you**

There are different ways your partner can support you. You might want them with you at hospital appointments. This can help you feel supported, and your partner feel valued. They can ask questions too, which can make it easier to talk together afterwards.

### **Talk openly**

A cancer diagnosis affects both you and your partner, so you should both try to talk about how you feel. If one partner feels they always have to be strong for the other, they may begin to feel angry and resentful.

### **Deal with strong emotions**

Strong emotions can sometimes make talking difficult. Often partners try to protect each other by hiding their fears and worries. Talking may help you understand each other and feel closer.

### **Different ways to communicate**

Facial expressions, body language, gestures and tone of voice are all ways to show what we are thinking and feeling. You could also try writing down your feelings and sharing them with your partner.

### **Look after your relationship**

Spend time together and plan fun activities. It is important to keep to your normal routine as much as possible.

## Talk about whether cancer is affecting your sex life

Cancer and its treatments can affect your sex life and relationships. But it does not have to mean an end to sex and intimacy.

We have more information about talking about your cancer diagnosis. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/talking](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/talking) We also have information about the possible effects on your sex life at [macmillan.org.uk/sex-and-cancer](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/sex-and-cancer) and in our booklet [Cancer and your sex life](#).

You can use [this tool](#) to write down your feelings and share these with your partner.

## Find support outside of your relationship

It may also be helpful for you or your partner to talk to others in a similar situation. You can do this on our [Online Community](#). You may also want to [speak to a counsellor](#) or go to a [support group](#), either on your own or with your partner.

Some organisations offer relationship counselling, such as [Relate](#), [Relate NI](#) and [Relationships Scotland](#).

## If your partner is your carer

Your partner may also be your carer. A carer is anyone who provides unpaid support to a family member or friend who could not manage without this help. If your partner is your carer, this can also have a big impact on your relationship.

Your partner may find it helpful to read our booklet [Looking after someone with cancer](#). It has practical tips for carers.

## If you are single

If you are single, you may or may not feel like this is the right time to start a new relationship.

If you do want to start a new relationship, it may be hard to decide when to tell a new partner about the cancer. And you may not know how much you want to tell them.

It is best to be open with the other person and make time to talk about your situation.

## Getting support

If you think you need some help, you can get support from family or friends. Or you could contact a support organisation such as [Relate](#), [Relate NI](#) or [Relationships Scotland](#).

You can also call our cancer support specialists on [0808 808 00 00](#).

**“ My relationship with my wife suffered after the diagnosis. We slowly moved further and further apart, as we buried our fears. Psychological support really helped bring us back together. ”**

Ashley, diagnosed with mouth cancer



# Talking to children and teenagers

Talking to children and teenagers about cancer can be difficult at times. If you can talk to them in a way they can understand, they may cope better. We have some tips to help you talk to them.

## Why talking can help

People sometimes feel they are protecting children by not telling them about a cancer diagnosis. It is natural to want to protect children from difficult news.

You may have worries of your own that stop you talking about it. You may feel that talking about cancer will make it feel more real when you are still struggling to accept it. But explaining what is happening may make things less unsettling for children.

Children often know when something serious is affecting the people they care about. They may also notice changes in how the adults around them are feeling and behaving. It is important to give them the chance to talk about their fears and worries, and to ask questions. Talking about the cancer can help them feel more secure.

**“Telling the boys was my biggest worry. I didn’t want to upset and scare them but equally wanted to be open and honest with them. ”**

Victoria, diagnosed with ovarian cancer

## The benefits of talking

There are many benefits to talking to children and teenagers:

- Knowing what is happening may make them feel less anxious.
- It gives them a chance to talk about how they feel and to ask questions.
- It shows you trust them.
- You will not worry about them hearing your conversations with other people.
- It can make you feel closer and able to support each other.
- It might help them cope better with a difficult situation.

## The risks of not talking

It may be difficult starting to talk to children about cancer. But if you do not talk to them, they may:

- feel frightened because they do not know what is happening
- get the wrong idea about what is happening
- feel alone and worried with no one to talk to
- think they are not important enough to be included
- worry that they have done or thought something that has made someone unwell.

Children often find out about what is going on, even when you have not told them. For example, they may hear something from friends whose families know yours. They may wonder whether they can trust you to tell them about important things.

Children also learn things from TV, the internet and conversations they hear. But this information is not always accurate. If you do not speak to them about what is really happening, they may continue to believe this information.

## How children may react

Children can react in lots of different ways. How they understand and behave will depend on how old they are. You may have to repeat the things you tell them. This can be hard if you are finding it difficult to talk about the cancer.

Younger children may not understand what is happening, but they will notice changes to their routine. Teenagers or young people usually understand, but they may find it hard to talk about what is happening. You may find our booklet [Talking to children and teenagers when an adult has cancer](#) useful.

**“ Emotionally it was the most difficult time for me. I knew my wife and I could cope with our own emotions and feelings. But knowing that I was going to hurt my children really upset me. ”**

Sean, diagnosed with bowel cancer



# Talking at work

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# Talking to work colleagues

Many employers and work colleagues are supportive of people with cancer. Some people worry about telling their employer they have cancer. They may worry their employer will not support them, will sack (dismiss) them or will find an excuse to make them redundant.

This should not happen. If you have cancer, the law considers this a disability. This means you cannot be treated differently because you have cancer. That would be discrimination.

You may want to talk to:

- your line manager
- your human resources (HR) manager
- an occupational health adviser
- a trade union representative.

You should ask for the conversation to be in a private place and not be rushed. If you feel nervous, you could take someone with you.

If your employer or manager knows about your illness, you may be able to talk together about reasonable adjustments. These are changes that can help you keep working or return to work. For example, this could mean time off for hospital appointments or flexible working arrangements. If you do not tell your employer about your illness, it could cause problems later if you cannot do your job properly.

We have more information about the laws that protect you at work in our booklet [Your rights at work when you are affected by cancer](#). For more advice, you can also call the Macmillan Support Line for free on [0808 808 00 00](tel:0808 808 00 00).

## Asking your employer questions

You could ask your manager or employer the following questions:

- Where can I find company or organisation policies about cancer?
- Can we talk about what to tell others at work about the cancer and how it might affect how I work?
- Can my job be adjusted if I find certain tasks difficult?

We have more information about questions to ask in our booklet [Work and cancer](#). We also have more information about employment rights and coping with the effects of treatment at work in our booklet [Your rights at work when you are affected by cancer](#) and on our website at [macmillan.org.uk/sideeffectswork](http://macmillan.org.uk/sideeffectswork)

You can read our FAQs about work and cancer at [macmillan.org.uk/workcancerfaqs](http://macmillan.org.uk/workcancerfaqs)

You can order our booklets and leaflets for free.

Visit [orders.macmillan.org.uk](http://orders.macmillan.org.uk) or call [0808 808 00 00](tel:0808 808 00 00).





# Talking to other people at work

Talking to people at work can help them support you. You may decide to tell people you feel closest to first.

## Decide who to tell

Talking to the people you work with that you have cancer can be difficult. You may worry about how to tell them or their reactions.

You may decide to tell people you feel closest to first. They may be able to help you plan how to tell others.

It is a good idea to contact your manager or human resources (HR or personnel) department early on. There are laws that protect your rights at work when you have been diagnosed with cancer. We have more information in our booklet [Work and cancer](#).

If you are [self-employed](#), you might not need to tell any business contacts about the cancer. But they may need to know if your business agreements will be affected.

## The benefits of talking to colleagues

Telling people at work can have the following benefits:

- It gives them the chance to support you.
- You can let them know if you need help.
- They may suggest helpful ways for you to cope with your work.
- It may make you feel closer to the people you work with.
- Other people with experience of cancer could support you.

If you think it would be helpful, you could give people some details about your treatment and its side effects. For example, you could let them know if:

- tiredness is a problem
- your concentration is affected
- you are at risk of infection.

Sometimes people may avoid you. This is usually because they do not know what to say or are worried about saying the wrong thing. Showing them you can talk openly about your illness may help.



# If you do not want to tell people at work

Some people prefer not to tell people at work that they have cancer. They may want to keep one area of their life as normal as possible. This can be a good way of coping for some people.

You may find the effects of cancer or cancer treatment, and the need to take time off, make it difficult not to tell colleagues. People you work with may be aware that something is different, and may feel uncomfortable if they do not know what it is.

It may help to take some time to think about the benefits and disadvantages of telling people. You could talk to Macmillan's cancer support specialists on [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000). We also have more information about [help with work and cancer](#).

# Risk to people you work with

There are many misunderstandings about cancer. Some colleagues may worry that they could be harmed if you are having treatments such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy. However, there is no risk to them.

Sometimes, colleagues may worry that they can catch cancer. But cancer cannot be passed on like an infection. The people you work with have no risk of catching cancer.

# If you are self-employed

If you are self-employed, you may feel there are fewer people you can talk to. This can feel isolating. You can call the Macmillan Support Line on [0808 808 00 00](tel:0808 808 00 00) to talk:

- about how you are feeling
- to a money adviser who can give guidance on the practical needs of you and your business.

Someone who works in the same area of work may also be able to give you advice on your business.

When you are self-employed, other people or businesses may rely on you to deliver goods or services. They may also rely on your payments. They might need to know you have cancer. You will have to balance your feelings about telling people with the needs of your business.

But some people and businesses may not need to know. It is your choice whether to tell them. It may be hard to tell people about the cancer. But it might mean they can give you practical and emotional support.

We have more information in our booklet [Self-employment and cancer](#). It includes details of the support available to help you continue with your business.



# Talking with healthcare staff

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# Talking with your healthcare team

Appointments with your healthcare team can be short. Sometimes people feel they are not getting the information or support they need. You might find it hard to ask your healthcare team the right questions and remember their answers. Or you might find you forget to ask important questions.

## Practical tips for talking with healthcare staff

You may have questions that feel hard to ask. Or you may want to talk about subjects that are embarrassing to you. Remember the healthcare professionals you speak to are used to talking to people about all sorts of things. They are there to help.

We have tips about asking your healthcare team questions on the following pages.

### **Plan your questions before your appointment**

We have a tool on the next page that may help you think about:

- things that are going well with your cancer treatment
- things that could be better with your cancer treatment
- anything else you want to mention.

[illegible]

## **Write down the important points**

You can take these to your appointment to remind you about things you want to ask. You can also take notes during your appointment.

You can also record the conversation with your healthcare professional, so you can listen to it later. Make sure you they agree to you recording it.

You can also ask your healthcare team for a copy of any letters with details of your discussions. This can be useful if your family or friends ask you questions.

## **Take a relative or friend with you**

A relative or friend can help you remember things the health professional says. They can remind you of questions you want to ask but may forget. They can also make notes.

## **Be honest when describing problems**

Try not to say you are feeling better than you really are. It is important that the healthcare professional knows if there are any problems. You can also talk about your emotions, including feelings of anxiety or depression. Even if your healthcare team cannot help you, they can refer you to someone who can.

## **Use your own words**

Your healthcare professional may use medical words, but you do not have to. Using your own words will show your healthcare team you understand what they are telling you.

## **Ask for simpler explanations**

It is okay to say you do not understand something your healthcare professional has said. Ask them to explain things in a simpler way.

## **Say if you are embarrassed**

Talking about your body or symptoms can be embarrassing. But healthcare professionals are used to all kinds of questions and are there to help. When you start talking, you can say, 'This is embarrassing to talk about, but...'

## **Make sure you understand**

It is a good idea to make sure your healthcare professional knows how much you have understood. You can say things such as:

- 'So you are saying that...'
- 'If I have got that right, you mean that...'

This will also encourage them to explain things more clearly if you need them to. Do not feel embarrassed to ask about anything you are unsure about.

## **Get support if you do not speak or understand English well**

The NHS must make sure that anyone who uses their services can get all the information they need. If language is an issue, they should offer:

- a professional interpreter in the language you choose
- translation in the written language you choose.

These services are free.

## Find out who else can answer your questions

You could make another appointment to ask your questions if:

- you do not talk about everything in the first discussion
- they give you news that changes the questions you wanted to ask.

You may also be given a phone number for a clinical nurse specialist (CNS). A CNS gives information about cancer, and support during treatment. If you have forgotten to ask a question or if you do not understand something, you can phone them.

We have a booklet called [Ask about your cancer treatment](#), which you may find helpful.

**“ Many of the people I help don’t know how to ask for support, so I want to educate people and let them know they have the right to support and they have got the right to have their voice heard. ”**

Sarifa, diagnosed with breast cancer

# Problems with your healthcare team

Most people are happy with the treatment and care they get from healthcare professionals. But sometimes mistakes happen and things go wrong. This can be very upsetting.

If you are unhappy with the care you get, talk to your healthcare team about it. Say what you are unhappy with and how it affects you. This can help them try to change the situation.

If your disagreement is about your treatment at the hospital, you can contact your local [patient advocacy service](#). They can help sort out any problems.

# Getting information

Some people want to know as much as possible about an illness. This can help them explain things to their family or friends and help them talk with their healthcare team.

Sometimes you may have a choice of treatments. In this situation, you can ask your doctor to explain more about each treatment. This way, you can make the right choice for you. It can help to take some time to think about your options.

We have more information in our booklet [Making treatment decisions](#). This includes information on getting a second opinion. You can also talk about your treatment options with our cancer support specialists by calling [0808 808 00 00](#).

For some people, having more information helps them feel more in control. Other people prefer not to know all the details and want to leave treatment decisions to their doctors.

But you need to have enough information to be able to consent to treatment. It is best to tell your healthcare team how you feel, so they know how much information to give you. This will help them focus on the issues that are important to you.

## Reliable sources of information

Sometimes it might feel hard to get all the information you need. Your doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals can help you and answer your questions. They have the most information about the cancer and your general health. We have more information about [talking to healthcare professionals](#).

There are also many other ways of getting support and information. Your doctor or nurse can talk to you about where to get more information. It is important to use a reliable source. Make sure the information is up to date and applies to you.

There are many myths or lies about cancer. For example, some people may believe cancer can never be cured. Some people may want to tell you about bad experiences of cancer that are not relevant to your situation. If this happens, tell the person that you do not want to hear about what has happened to other people. You can say you will get the information you need from healthcare professionals.



## Getting the right information

There is a lot of information available online 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 that is up to date.

When you are reading information, it can help to look for the Patient Information Forum (PIF) Tick:



The PIF Tick means that the information is based on up-to-date evidence and follows strict guidelines.

Some health information videos on YouTube also have a blue panel beneath the video. These panels are applied to videos that have been identified as reliable sources of information. For example, videos from the NHS have the following blue panel beneath them:



We have information in a range of formats about cancer, cancer treatments and living with cancer. You can order our information by visiting [orders.macmillan.org.uk](https://orders.macmillan.org.uk) or by calling our cancer support specialists on [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000).

You can also go to a local [Macmillan Information and Support Centre](#) to talk to experts and trained volunteers. They can give you support.

# Dealing with uncertainty

We all like to know what is going to happen to us. It helps us feel secure about the future. After treatment you may feel that this has been taken away from you. Your future may feel uncertain, and this can be frightening.

If you understand what might happen next, it may help you cope better. For example, you could ask, 'Can you tell from the x-rays if the treatment is working?'

If you are finding it hard to deal with uncertainty, try talking to family, friends or healthcare professionals about how you feel.

Some people find it useful to talk about things with a counsellor. Your local cancer information centre or cancer support group may have a counsellor who you can talk to. Or your doctors and nurses can help you contact one.

We have more information about dealing with uncertainty in our booklet [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer.](#)



# Dealing with reactions

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Dealing with disagreements 70

# Dealing with people's reactions

You may not get the reaction you expect. We have suggested a few ways to make these difficult conversations easier for both of you.

## Accept their feelings

Remember that the person you are telling about the cancer cares about you. But they may be struggling to accept the cancer or may not know the best way to help you.

When you are trying to cope with cancer, it may upset you to have to deal with their feelings. But try not to avoid them or ignore their feelings, as it may make things worse.

## Try to respond

How you respond can help other people talk about how they are feeling. You could say things such as:

- 'When I talk about the cancer, you look really upset.'
- 'I know you are feeling very helpless and taking control is your way of coping, but...'

It might help to say how you feel too. For example, you might say things such as:

- 'I think both of us are finding this awful.'
- 'I know you are worried about what could happen and so am I.'

The more aware you both are of each other's feelings, the better you can communicate.

## **If a person does not want to talk, ask them to listen**

Some people find it hard to talk about things that upset them. You can tell them that they do not need to talk, but you would just like them to listen.

## **Talk about other things**

If someone finds it hard to discuss the cancer diagnosis, it may be easier to talk about other things. This can also be useful, as it gives you time to talk about things other than cancer.

## **Ask to have a break from talking**

Ask to have a break from talking if you are:

- being forced to talk before you are ready
- finding the conversation difficult to deal with.

You can come back to the conversation when you feel ready.

# Dealing with disagreements

People with cancer may have times when they are frustrated or angry about what they are going through. If you are supporting them, this may get directed at you. They may be angry about the cancer, but this can be hard to put into words. They may take out their feelings on the people they care about. This can feel hard, especially as you may also be coping with your own feelings.

If you are talking to other people about your cancer or treatment, you may have to deal with reactions you would not expect. This may include disagreements. We have some practical tips to help you manage this on the next page.



- Try to understand the other person's side of the argument. If you cannot agree on an issue, that is okay. You can respect what the other person feels or thinks.
- Take time to find out what the other person thinks or wants.
- Give the other person a chance to talk about how they feel, even if you disagree.
- Avoid words such as 'always' and 'never' – for example, 'You never listen to me,' or, 'I always call you'. These words can make the other person defensive.
- Try not to criticise the person. Say how their actions made you feel instead. For example, instead of saying, 'You are thoughtless – I have to remember everything', try saying, 'I feel stressed when I have a lot to remember'.
- Talk about how you feel with someone else. This may make you feel better about it.
- Write down some of your feelings. This can help you understand your thoughts and feelings better.
- If you are unhappy talking to people you care about, it may help to talk to a counsellor. We have more information about talking therapies at [macmillan.org.uk/talking-therapies](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/talking-therapies)





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# About our information

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

Our information has the PIF Tick quality mark for trusted health information. This means our information has been through a professional and strong production process.

## Order what you need

You may want to order more booklets or leaflets like this one. Visit [orders.macmillan.org.uk](https://orders.macmillan.org.uk) or call us on [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000).

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

## Online information

All our information is also available online at [macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support](https://macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support). You can also find videos featuring 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
- interactive PDFs
- large print
- translations.

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

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

## The language we use

We want everyone affected by cancer to feel our information is written for them.

We want our information to be as clear as possible. To do this, we try to:

- use plain English
- explain medical words
- use short sentences
- use illustrations to explain text
- structure the information clearly
- make sure important points are clear.

We use gender-inclusive language and talk to our readers as 'you' so that everyone feels included. Where clinically necessary we use the terms 'men' and 'women' or 'male' and 'female'. For example, we do so when talking about parts of the body or mentioning statistics or research about who is affected.

To find out more about how we produce our information, visit [macmillan.org.uk/ourinfo](https://macmillan.org.uk/ourinfo)



# Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we are 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 support line is made up of specialist teams who can help you with:

- emotional and practical support if you or someone you know has been diagnosed with cancer
- clinical information from our specialist nurses about things like diagnosis and treatments
- welfare rights advice, for information about benefits and general money worries.

To contact any of our teams, call the Macmillan Support Line for free on [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000). Or visit [macmillan.org.uk/support-line](https://macmillan.org.uk/support-line) to chat online and find the options and opening times.

Our trained cancer information advisers can listen and signpost you to further support.

Our cancer information nurse specialists can talk you through information about your diagnosis and treatment. They can help you understand what to expect from your diagnosis and provide information to help you manage symptoms and side effects.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

You can also email us, or use the Macmillan Chat Service via our website. You can use the chat service to ask our advisers about anything that is worrying you. Tell them what you would like to talk about so they can direct your chat to the right person. Click on the 'Chat to us' button, which appears on pages across the website. Or go to [macmillan.org.uk/talktous](https://macmillan.org.uk/talktous)

If you would like to talk to someone in a language other than English, we also offer an interpreter service for our Macmillan Support Line. Call [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000) and say, in English, the language you want to use. Or send us a web chat message saying you would like an interpreter. Let us know the language you need and we'll arrange for an interpreter to contact you.

## **Macmillan Information and Support Centres**

Our Information and Support Centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. Visit one to get the information you need and speak with someone face to face. If you would like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone confidentially.

Find your nearest centre at [macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](https://macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres) or call us on [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000).

## **Help with money worries**

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you have been affected in this way, we can help. Please note the opening times may vary by service.

### **Financial advice**

Our expert money advisers on the Macmillan Support Line can help you deal with money worries and recommend other useful organisations that can help.

### **Help accessing benefits**

You can speak to our money advisers for more information. Call us free on [0808 808 00 00](tel:08088080000). Visit [macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport) for more information about benefits.

## **Help with work and cancer**

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

## 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 is why we help bring people together in their communities and online.

### Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, family member or friend, 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://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://macmillan.org.uk/community)

You can also use our Ask an Expert service on the Online Community. You can ask a money adviser, cancer information nurse or an information and support adviser any questions you have.

## Macmillan healthcare professionals

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.



# Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support. Details correct at time of printing.

## Counselling

### British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Tel **0145 588 3300**

[www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services across the UK. You can also search for a qualified counsellor on the 'Therapist Directory' page.

### UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Tel **0207 014 9955**

[www.psychotherapy.org.uk](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk)

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

## Emotional and mental health support

### Mind

Helpline **0300 123 3393**

[www.mind.org.uk](http://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](http://www.relate.org.uk)

Offers advice, relationship counselling, sex therapy, workshops, mediation, consultations and more.

## **Relate NI**

[www.relateni.org](http://www.relateni.org)

Offers counselling services to support people and their relationships across Northern Ireland. Available face to face, by phone and online.

## **Relationships Scotland**

Infoline **0345 119 2020**

[www.relationships-scotland.org.uk](http://www.relationships-scotland.org.uk)

Provides relationship counselling, mediation and family support across Scotland.

## **Samaritans**

Helpline **116 123**

Email **[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)**

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

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

## **General cancer support organisations**

### **Black Women Rising**

[www.blackwomenrisinguk.org](http://www.blackwomenrisinguk.org)

Aims to educate, inspire and bring opportunities for women from the BAME community. Shares stories and supports Black cancer patients and survivors through treatment and remission.

### **Cancer Black Care**

Tel **0734 047 1970**

[www.cancerblackcare.org.uk](http://www.cancerblackcare.org.uk)

Provides support for all those living with and affected by cancer, with an emphasis on Black people and people of colour.

### **Cancer Focus Northern Ireland**

Helpline **0800 783 3339**

[www.cancerfocusni.org](http://www.cancerfocusni.org)

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

### **Cancer Research UK**

Helpline **0808 800 4040**

[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

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

### **Macmillan Cancer Voices**

[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices)

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

### **Maggie's**

Tel **0300 123 1801**

[www.maggies.org](http://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.

### **Penny Brohn UK**

Helpline **0303 3000 118**

[www.pennybrohn.org.uk](http://www.pennybrohn.org.uk)

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

### **Tenovus**

Helpline **0808 808 1010**

[www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk](http://www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk)

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

## Patient advocacy groups

### England

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

[www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service](http://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service)

Aims to help patients, relatives, carers and friends find answers and resolve healthcare problems as quickly as possible. Can also give information and support about making a complaint. You can also find a PALS office by asking your GP or hospital or calling **111**.

### Northern Ireland

Patient and Client Council

[pcc-ni.net](http://pcc-ni.net)

**0800 917 0222**

Gives information and support about making a complaint about NHS services.

### Scotland

Patient Advice and Support Service (PASS)

[www.cas.org.uk/pass](http://www.cas.org.uk/pass)

Tel **0800 917 2127**

Can help you make a complaint about NHS healthcare in Scotland, or provide an advocate to help you get your views and wishes heard.

### Wales

Community Health Councils (CHC)

[www.wales.nhs.uk/ourservices/directory/CommunityHealthCouncils](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/ourservices/directory/CommunityHealthCouncils)

Provides free patient advocacy services. Search for your local CHC using the website.

## **Financial support or legal advice and information**

### **NI Direct**

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

Has information about benefits and public services in Northern Ireland.

## **Support for young people**

### **Teenage Cancer Trust**

Tel **0207 612 0370**

[www.teenagecancertrust.org](http://www.teenagecancertrust.org)

A UK-wide charity devoted to improving the lives of teenagers and young adults with cancer. Runs a support network for young people with cancer, their friends and families.

### **Young Lives vs Cancer**

Tel **0300 330 0803**

[www.younglivesvscancer.org.uk](http://www.younglivesvscancer.org.uk)

Provides clinical, practical, financial and emotional support to children with cancer and their families in the UK.

### **Youth Access**

Tel **0208 772 9900**

[www.youthaccess.org.uk](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk)

A UK-wide organisation providing counselling and information for young people. Find your local service by visiting [youthaccess.org.uk/find-your-local-service](http://youthaccess.org.uk/find-your-local-service)

## Support for older people

### Age UK

Helpline **0800 678 1602**

[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Provides information and advice for older people across the UK via the website and advice line. Also publishes impartial and informative fact sheets and advice guides.

## LGBT-specific support

### LGBT Foundation

Tel **0345 330 3030**

[lgbt.foundation](http://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.

### OUTpatients (formerly Live Through This)

[www.outpatients.org.uk](http://www.outpatients.org.uk)

A safe space for anybody who identifies as part of the queer spectrum and has had an experience with any kind of cancer at any stage. Also produces resources about LGBT cancer experiences. OUTpatients runs a peer support group with Maggie's Barts.

## **Advanced cancer and end of life care**

### **Hospice UK**

Tel **0207 520 8200**

[www.hospiceuk.org](http://www.hospiceuk.org)

Provides information about living with advanced illness. Also provides free booklets and a directory of hospice services in the UK.

### **Marie Curie**

Helpline **0800 090 2309**

[www.mariecurie.org.uk](http://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.

### **The Natural Death Centre**

Helpline **0196 271 2690**

[www.naturaldeath.org.uk](http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk)

Offers independent advice on aspects of dying, funeral planning and bereavement.



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## 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 members of Macmillan's Centre of Clinical Expertise.

Thanks 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 **[informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk)**

## Sources

Below is a sample of the sources used in our Talking about cancer information. If you'd like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at **informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk**

Mind. Supporting yourself while caring for someone. [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helping-someone-else/carers-friends-family-coping-support/support-for-you](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helping-someone-else/carers-friends-family-coping-support/support-for-you) [accessed September 2023].

NHS. Getting a care needs assessment. [www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/help-from-social-services-and-charities/getting-a-needs-assessment](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/help-from-social-services-and-charities/getting-a-needs-assessment) [accessed September 2023].

Samaritans. Contact a Samaritan. [www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us](http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/contact-us) [accessed September 2023].

Sharpe L, Curran L, Butow P, Thewes B. Fear of cancer recurrence and death anxiety. *Psycho-Oncology*. 2018;27:2559–2565. [accessed September 2023].

Zeng Q, Ling D, Chen W, et al. Family Caregivers' Experiences of Caring for Patients with Head and Neck Cancer. A Systematic Review and Metasynthesis of Qualitative Studies. *Cancer Nursing* 2023; 46,1, 14–28. [accessed September 2023].

## Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It is just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They are produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, money advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we are here 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.

### 5 ways you can help someone with cancer

#### 1. Share your cancer experience

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

#### 2. 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.

#### 3. 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?

#### 4. Raise money

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

#### 5. Give money

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

## 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

Valid from

Expiry date

Issue no

Security number

Signature

Date     /     /

## Do not 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 would rather donate online  
go to [macmillan.org.uk/donate](https://macmillan.org.uk/donate)



Registered with  
**FUNDRAISING  
REGULATOR**



Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to: Supporter Donations,  
Freepost RUCY-XGCA-XTHU, Macmillan Cancer Support, PO Box 791, York House, York YO1 0NJ

## This booklet is about talking with people when you have cancer. It is for anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer.

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The booklet explains why it is important to talk about cancer and who you might want to talk to. It also has practical tips for having a conversation. We have other booklets for carers, family or friends.

At Macmillan we know cancer can disrupt your whole life. We'll do whatever it takes to help everyone living with cancer in the UK get the support they need right now, and transform cancer care for the future.

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call **0808 808 00 00** or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.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 Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, interactive PDFs, easy read, Braille, large print and translations.

To order these, visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call our support line.

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