

If you are diagnosed with cancer – a quick guide

This information is about what to expect when you find out you have cancer, and where to get help and support.

Any words that are underlined are explained in the word list at the end.

Being diagnosed with cancer can be a huge shock. You may be feeling lots of different emotions. Many people are treated successfully or able to live with cancer for many years. There are lots of people and services that can support you.

If you have any questions about this information, ask your doctor or nurse at the hospital where you are having treatment.

You can also call Macmillan Cancer Support on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your own language. When you call us, please tell us in English which language you need.

There is more cancer information in other languages at [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations)

This information is about:

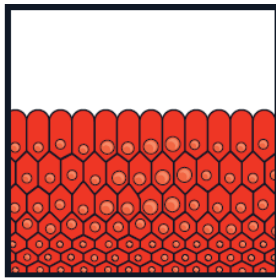
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What is cancer?

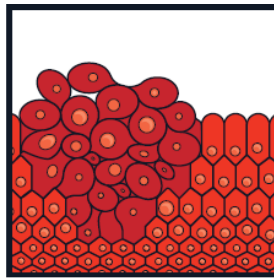
Cancer starts in the cells in our body. Cells are tiny building blocks that make up the body's organs and tissues. Cells receive signals from the body, telling them when to grow and when to divide to make new cells. This is how our bodies grow and heal. These cells can become old, damaged or no longer needed. When this happens, the cell gets a signal from the body to stop working and die.

Sometimes these signals can go wrong, and the cell becomes abnormal. The abnormal cell may keep dividing to make more and more abnormal cells. These can form a lump, called a tumour.

Normal cells



Cells forming a tumour



Not all tumours are cancer. A tumour that is not cancer (a benign tumour) may grow, but it cannot spread to anywhere else in the body. It usually only causes problems if it grows and presses on nearby organs.

A tumour that is cancer (a malignant tumour) can grow into nearby tissue.

Cancer cells sometimes break away from the first cancer and travel through the blood or lymphatic system to other parts of the body. Cancer cells that spread and develop into a tumour somewhere else in the body are called a secondary cancer or a metastasis.

Some types of cancer start from blood cells. Abnormal cells can build up in the blood, and sometimes the bone marrow. The bone marrow is where blood cells are made. These types of cancer are sometimes called blood cancers.

What happens after diagnosis?

Your healthcare team should talk to you about your treatment options and about any support you need. They will tell you what your treatment will involve and when it can start. You may need to have some more tests or scans to find out more about the cancer.

If you are LGBTQ+

The information on this page is written for everyone affected by cancer. If you are LGBTQ+, you may have additional questions.

Sometimes it can help you feel better supported if your healthcare team know your sexual orientation or gender. And it may help your healthcare team give the right information and support to you and the people closest to you.

If you are trans (transgender) or non-binary, talking to a health professional about your body may be difficult. Sometimes, tests or treatment may involve parts of the body you find upsetting to talk about. You may also have questions if you take hormones or have had gender-affirming surgeries.

Try to take someone you trust to your appointments. They can listen and help you cope with what is happening.

Health and social care professionals you might meet

When you have cancer, you may meet lots of different health and social care professionals.

Your main contact

You should have a main contact person in your healthcare team. They may be called a key worker or link worker. You will be given their name and contact details. If you have questions or need advice, they can help.

In your local area

There are professionals who can help look after you while you are at home. They will be in contact with your hospital team. They include:

- **GP** – Your GP looks after your health while you are at home. They can help you manage symptoms and side effects and arrange for you to see specialists if needed. They can arrange services to help you at home and talk to you about any treatment decisions you need to make.
- **Community and district nurses** – These nurses can visit you at home and give care and support to you and anyone looking after you. Your GP can contact them for you.
- **Practice nurse** – Some GP practices have nurses who work alongside the GP. A practice nurse can help explain things to you and might do things like take blood tests or put dressings on wounds.

Hospital team (MDT)

At hospital, a multidisciplinary team (MDT) will manage your treatment and care.

This is a group of health and social care professionals. The group might include some or all of these people:

- **Surgeon** – a doctor who does operations.
- **Oncologist** – a doctor who treats cancer.
- **Haematologist** – a doctor who treats blood problems.
- **Radiologist** – a doctor who is trained to look at x-rays and scans.
- **Clinical nurse specialist (CNS)** – a nurse who gives information and support during treatment.
- **Palliative care doctor** – a doctor who helps with symptom control.

There may be other people in the MDT depending on the type of cancer you have.

Social services and voluntary organisations

If you need help at home, for example with washing, dressing, cleaning or shopping, speak to your GP or main contact. They may refer you to a social worker. A social worker can help with practical and financial problems. There may also be other organisations in your area that could help.

How treatment is planned

Your healthcare team, who are experts in your type of cancer, will plan your treatment. They will think about:

- the type of cancer
- the size of the cancer and whether it has spread
- your general health
- national treatment guidelines
- your preferences and what is important to you.

Doctors need your permission (consent) before you have any treatment.

Make sure you understand the treatment options. Your doctor or nurse should answer any questions you have about the treatment. Cancer treatment can be complicated so you may need to ask questions more than once. It might help to take a relative or friend to appointments with you. They can help you remember what was said. It might also help to make a list of questions that you want to ask and take it to your appointment. You can write down the answers so you remember them.

Making decisions about treatment

There might be more than one possible treatment. Your doctor may offer you a choice. They will give you all the information you need to make your decision. Before you decide what is right for you, it is important to understand:

- what each treatment involves
- the possible side effects
- the benefits and disadvantages of each treatment.

Your healthcare team will give you time to choose. They can also help you with the decision.

The main cancer treatments

The aim of treatment is to cure the cancer, or control it and relieve its symptoms.

The type of treatment you have will depend on the cancer and your situation. You may have more than one treatment. Cancer treatments can include:

- **surgery** – the cancer is removed in an operation
- **radiotherapy** – high-energy x-rays are used to destroy cancer cells
- **chemotherapy** – drugs are used to destroy cancer cells
- **hormonal therapies** – these drugs change the activity of hormones in your body, which can slow down or stop the cancer from growing.
- **targeted therapies** – these drugs interfere with the way cancer cells grow.

Clinical trials

Clinical trials are medical research studies involving people.. They test new treatments to see if they are more effective than current treatments. A trial might involve testing a new drug or testing a new way of giving treatment.

If there are any trials that you can take part in, your doctor will talk to you about them. You can choose not to take part in a trial.

Side effects

Cancer treatments can cause side effects. These can often be reduced and managed. Your healthcare team will give you advice. Most side effects gradually go away after treatment finishes.

Talking to your healthcare team

Having cancer can be a worrying and confusing time. Talking to your healthcare team can help. Many people feel better and more in control when they know what is happening to them and why.

People often feel that hospital staff are too busy to answer their questions. But it is important for you to understand what is happening and how the cancer and its treatment might affect you. The staff are there to help you. They should make time for your questions. If you do not understand or speak English well, the hospital can arrange an interpreter for you.

You might find some questions difficult to ask, especially if they are about personal issues. But your healthcare team are there to help and they are used to answering these questions.

It is important that you understand what you are told. If you do not understand, ask the doctor or nurse to explain again.

Questions to ask your healthcare team

Here are some questions you may want to ask your healthcare team. They may not all be relevant for you.

- What does my diagnosis mean?
- How advanced is the cancer?
- What will my treatment involve?
- What are the benefits, risks and side effects of each treatment?
- How will the treatment affect my daily life?
- How effective will treatment be?
- Who can I talk to about how I am feeling?
- Who can I speak to if I think of questions later?
- I have religious or spiritual wishes – will these be met?

Coping with cancer

Your emotions

It is common to have many different emotions when you are told you have cancer. You may feel shocked, scared, worried, angry or depressed. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Talking about how you feel can often help.

Where to get support:

- **Macmillan** – See the **How Macmillan can help you** section below for all the ways we can help.
- **Counsellors** – A counsellor can help you talk about and find ways to deal with your feelings in a place where you feel safe. Ask your cancer doctor or GP if you would like counselling.
- **Support groups** – Talking to other people who have cancer may help. Ask your doctor or nurse about groups in your area, or visit macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups

Money, work and travel

There are many ways Macmillan can help if cancer has affected your job or finances. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to talk about any of these issues.

- We can tell you about benefits you might be entitled to and help you apply for them.
- We can help you with questions about mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.
- We provide grants – payments to help you cope with extra costs caused by cancer.
- We can give you information and advice if cancer has affected your work.
- We can give you information about travelling if you have cancer.

Physical changes

Sometimes, cancer or cancer treatments can affect the way your body looks or works. Your doctor or nurse can give you advice about this and what can help. We can also give you information – call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Complementary therapies

These are other therapies that may help you feel better, such as meditation or relaxation. These therapies do not treat cancer. You should always tell your cancer doctor about any other therapies you want to use.

Religion and spirituality

After a cancer diagnosis, some people become more aware of religious beliefs or spiritual feelings. People with a strong religious faith often find this very helpful. Other people may question their faith.

Some people find comfort in prayer or meditation. Many people find it helpful knowing that other people are praying for them.

You can talk to a chaplain, minister, priest, rabbi or other religious leader even if you are not sure about what you believe. Spiritual and religious leaders are used to

helping, and you may find peace of mind.

Support for family, friends and carers

People close to you may also need information or support. Our cancer support specialists are here to help everyone affected by cancer, including your relatives and friends. They can call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

A carer is someone who gives unpaid support to a relative or friend with cancer who could not manage without this help. They might help with personal care, give emotional support or help with housework. If someone is helping to look after you, it is important they get support too. There is lots of help available for them. They should talk to your doctor or nurse about this or call Macmillan on **0808 808 00 00**.

Getting the right care and support for you

If you have cancer and do not speak English, you may be worried that this will affect your cancer treatment and care. But you're your healthcare team should offer you care, support and information that meets your needs.

We know that sometimes people may face extra challenges in getting the right support. For example, if you work or have a family it can be hard to find time to go to hospital appointments. You might also have worries about money and transport costs. All of this can be stressful and hard to cope with.

But help is available. Our free support line **0808 808 00 00** can offer advice, in your language, about your situation. You can speak to nurses, financial guides, welfare rights advisers and work support advisers.

We also offer Macmillan Grants to people with cancer. These are one-off payments that can be used for things like hospital parking, travel costs, childcare or heating bills.

How Macmillan can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we are here to support you.

Macmillan Support Line

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 help with medical questions, give you information about financial support, or be there to listen if you need someone to talk to. The free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Web chat

You can send us a web chat message saying you would like an interpreter. Tell us, in English, the language you need, and we will arrange for someone to contact you. Click on the 'Chat to us' button, which appears on pages across the website. Or go to **macmillan.org.uk/talktous**

Macmillan website

Our website has lots of information in English about cancer. There is also more information in other languages at [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations)

We can also arrange translations just for you. Email us at cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk to tell us what you need.

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

Local support groups

At a support group, you can talk to other people affected by cancer. Find out about support groups in your area at [macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Macmillan Online Community

You can also talk to other people affected by cancer online at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community) You can access it at any time of day or night. You can share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts.

Word list

Word	In English	How to say in English	Meaning
	Benefits		Money paid to you by the government to help you with costs.
	Benign		A lump in the body that is not cancer and cannot spread to anywhere else in the body.
	Cells		The tiny building blocks that make up the organs and tissues of our body.
	Diagnosed		If you are diagnosed with cancer, it means your doctor has found that you have cancer.
	Diagnosis		A diagnosis is when your doctor finds out what illness or problem is causing your symptoms.

	Healthcare team		The team of doctors, nurses and other professionals that will look after you.
	Key worker		This person is your main point of contact. You should have their contact details. They can answer your questions and tell you who can help with different things.
	Lymphatic system		A network of tubes and glands throughout the body. It is part of the immune system. The system fights infections and drains fluid out of our tissue and organs.
	Malignant		A lump in the body that is cancer and can spread around the body.
	Metastasis		A secondary tumour that has spread from where the cancer first started in the body.
	Palliative care		Care given to someone with a cancer that cannot be cured. This may include treatment to shrink the cancer or to reduce symptoms and make someone more comfortable.
	Side effects		Unwanted effects of cancer treatment. For example, hair loss, feeling sick or tiredness. Most side effects go away after treatment finishes.
	Tumour		A tumour is a group of cells that are growing in an abnormal way. The abnormal cells keep multiplying and form a lump.

More information in your language

We have information in your language about these topics:

<p>Types of cancer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Breast cancer• Large 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">• Cancer and coronavirus• Claiming benefits when you have cancer• Eating problems and cancer• End of life• Healthy eating• Help with costs when you have cancer• If you're diagnosed with cancer – A quick guide• Sepsis and cancer• Side effects of cancer treatment• Tiredness (fatigue) and cancer
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To see this information, go to [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations)

References and thanks

This information has been written and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been translated into this language by a translation company.

The information included is based on the Macmillan booklet **The cancer guide**. We can send you a copy, but the full booklet is only available in English.

This information has been reviewed by relevant experts and approved by our Chief Medical Editor, Professor Tim Iveson, Consultant Medical Oncologist and Macmillan Chief Medical Editor.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this information.

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

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