

WHAT YOU CAN DO

It can be hard to know what to do when you feel low. Knowing where to start can be especially daunting.

One of the best things to do is to talk about how you feel with someone close. Family and friends often know you best and will usually understand your feelings.

It's really important to take care of yourself. Try to eat well and exercise regularly. You may not feel like it at the time, but getting up and dressed each day can really help.

It's normal for your feelings to build up. If you feel like they are getting too much, there are ways to release your tension. Complementary therapies may help you to relax, while support groups allow you to share your experiences. Some organisations provide counselling and emotional support, if you feel this would help.

It may take a while for you to know what works and what doesn't. Advice and support is always available if you are finding it difficult to cope.

Managing day-to-day life

There are many sources of support that can help you. But there are also things you can do yourself to feel better.

It's important to look after yourself. If you're finding it difficult to manage your feelings, it can help to take things one day at a time and not look too far ahead. You may find that life gets easier to cope with as time passes.

Doing even the smallest tasks may help you feel better:

- Try to eat well every day. (If you have eating problems or a poor appetite, talk to your doctor or nurse.)
- If you can, get up and dressed every day.
- If you feel unwell, get some extra rest and don't delay seeing your doctor.
- Accept offers of help, or turn to other people for help.
- Keep to a regular sleeping pattern if you can.
- Try to exercise regularly – it can help you relax, boost your energy and help you sleep.
- Try to share your feelings.
- Try to keep your social life active by staying in contact with your family and friends.
- Recognise when you're feeling run down and stressed.
- For example, you may have headaches, trouble sleeping, tummy problems, or colds that don't go away. If you feel like this, see your doctor for advice.
- Try to find some time just for yourself every day when you can fully relax. But try not to sit still in one place for long periods of time. It can help to make your environment as comfortable as possible, perhaps with a comfy chair and plenty of light and fresh air. Listening to music or radio programmes may also help.
- If you can, try to make plans to do things you enjoy. You could book things a few weeks ahead, as this will give you something to look forward to.
- Some people find they lose motivation and begin to limit the amount of things they do. This can add to the feeling of being alone, so try to give yourself goals to achieve.

Taking control of your situation

Learning about the cancer and its treatment can give you back some feeling of control. This can help you feel more confident about the future. But it's up to you to decide how much information you would like at any time.

The information can help you during talks with your doctor, your family and your friends. It will also help you feel more involved in your care, and more in control generally.

It will also help if you tell people what you really think and feel. This will help them understand the issues that are important to you. You may like to use the table on 35 to write down your hopes and fears.

Reliable sources of information

Your doctors and nurses are in the best position to help you and answer your questions, because they know about your situation. They may not always have the information you're looking for though, and when they don't, there are lots of other reliable sources you can use.

A lot of misleading information is available, and many people still believe myths about cancer. It is important to get information that's up to date and comes from a reliable source.

You can get information from Macmillan. We have information in a range of formats about cancer, cancer treatments and all aspects of living with cancer. You can order any of our information by visiting be.macmillan.org.uk or by calling our cancer support specialists on 0808 808 00 00.

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Releasing tension

Tension can often be released by talking to other people. As well as talking to family or friends, you can call our [cancer support specialists](tel:08088080000) on 0808 808 00 00, or speak to your hospital staff or GP.

Some people find it helps to write down how they feel.

Keeping a diary or journal may be a way of expressing your fears and worries, without having to talk them through with other people.

You could also express yourself through drawing, painting, playing music or another creative hobby.

Sometimes you may feel like it's all getting too much for you.

If you feel this way, try thumping a cushion or pillow, turning the radio or CD player up very loud, or screaming. Having a good cry can also help release emotions. These things won't do anyone any harm and they may leave you feeling much better.

Physical activity

Doing physical activity can help us manage stress, anxiety and depression. It helps our bodies release chemicals (endorphins) that lift our mood and lower stress hormones. It can help with some side effects of treatment, such as tiredness, and also help you sleep better. It can give you more energy, which can help you feel more able to deal with problems.

It can really help to be active with other people, for example by joining an exercise group or going with family or friends. It can also be helpful to be active outdoors in a green environment, like a park. You could try gardening or joining a walking group. There are free, guided health walks across the UK.

Macmillan has teamed up with the Ramblers to offer Walking for Health – a network of organised walks across England. To learn more or find your nearest walk just visit [Walking for Health](#).

We also have information on walking [organisations](#) in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Complementary therapies

There are many types of complementary therapy that may help you feel better, including acupuncture,

aromatherapy, meditation, visualisation, homeopathy, art therapy and reflexology.

Complementary therapists usually work with the person as a whole. This is called a holistic approach. A complementary therapist who listens and cares may help you cope with some of your difficult feelings, which can help you get back some control.

Some hospitals and hospices provide complementary therapies alongside conventional cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy. We have more information on hospices. Some support groups also offer complementary therapies.

Complementary therapies may help you:

- feel better and improve your quality of life
- feel less stressed, tense and anxious
- sleep better
- feel more in control with some of your cancer symptoms
- with some of the side effects of your cancer treatment.

You might be advised not to have complementary therapies.

This is because it is not safe to have them if you have certain types of cancer or if you are having certain treatments. Your doctor will be able to give you more information about this. It is very important to tell your cancer doctor if you are thinking about having any complementary or alternative therapy.

If you have a complementary therapy, you should always use a registered therapist. And always let your complementary therapist know you have cancer. The [British Complementary Medicine Association](#) can give you the names of registered therapists and advice on what to look for. Remember to check the cost of treatment beforehand to make sure you're fairly charged.

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Self-help and support groups

Joining a self-help or support group can have many benefits. These groups offer a chance to talk to other people who may be in a similar situation to you, and who may be facing the same challenges. Not everyone finds talking in a group easy.

It may help to go along to see what the group is like and then make a decision.

You can search for groups in your area online by visiting macmillan.org.uk/in-your-area Alternatively, you can call our cancer support specialists on 0808 808 00 00 and they can help you find local groups.

Changing priorities

Cancer often causes people to think about their lives and their priorities. Some people make significant changes to their lives, such as changing their job. Or it may be a good time to think about joining a local hobby group so you can meet people. Doing something new may also help you feel better.

Alcohol and recreational drugs

It may feel good at first to have a few drinks or take recreational drugs to help you forget how you're feeling. However, this is only a short-term solution. Alcohol and drugs can cause problems and damage relationships with family and friends. In the long-term, alcohol and recreational drugs may seriously damage your health.

Taking recreational drugs can also change the effect of some painkillers, so your doctor or nurse may ask you about

this.

It is important to be open with them about using these drugs.

Do my feelings affect the cancer?

Your feelings and attitudes can affect the way you cope with cancer and its treatment, but there is no evidence that your thoughts, feelings or attitudes can influence the cancer itself. There is also no evidence that feeling negative or sad can delay your recovery from cancer or its treatment.

It is important to remember that cancer is influenced by many things, including our environment, our diet, and our genetic and physical make-up.

Whatever you're feeling is okay. It's important that you're able to talk honestly, and cry if you need to. This can help release tension and stress. It can even bring you closer to the person you're talking to. It's important to remember that all feelings and thoughts pass, and that you'll feel better at some point in the future.

Recording feelings

You may like to write about your good and bad days. This may help you decide on steps you can take to have more good days.

You may find it helpful to use the person-centred thinking tool. A table taken from thinkaboutyourlife.org, which was developed by cancer survivors. The website has examples, stories and support to help you use the tool.

Thanks

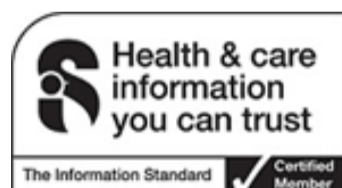
We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. If you'd like further information on the sources we use, please feel free to [contact us](mailto:bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk) on: bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk

All our information is reviewed by cancer or other relevant professionals to ensure that it's accurate and reflects the best evidence available. We thank all those people who have provided expert review for the information on this page.

Our information is also reviewed by people affected by cancer to ensure it is as relevant and accessible as possible. Thank you to all those people who reviewed what you're reading and have helped our information to develop.

You could help us too when you join our Cancer Voices Network – [find out more](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices) at: <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices>

Reviewed: 30 Sep 2014 Next review: 2017



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MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

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