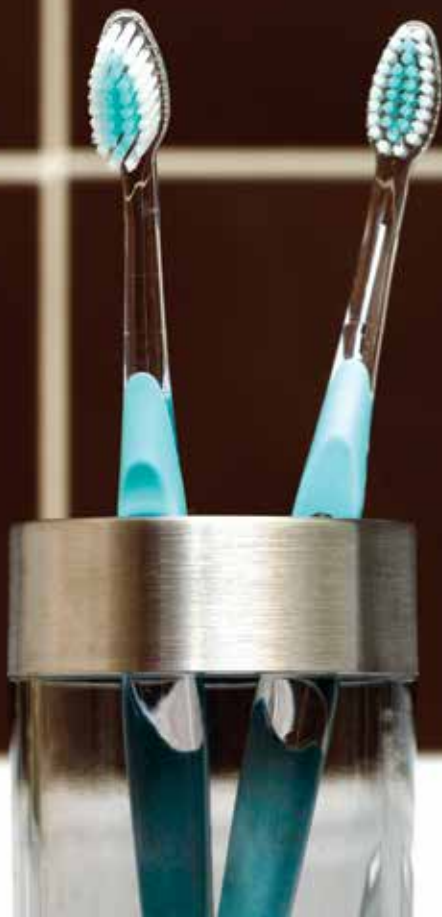


A practical guide to living with and after cancer

WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT

CANCER, YOU AND YOUR PARTNER



About this booklet

This booklet is for you if you or your partner has cancer. It talks about some of the issues you and your partner may face.

This booklet has been written so that it can be read by both members of a couple when one of them has cancer. In some places, we have included separate information for each person. You will see these marked as **'If you have cancer'** and **'If your partner has cancer'**.

We've included comments from people with cancer and their partners about how cancer affected their relationship and how they coped. We hope you find them helpful. Some are from our online community ([macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)) and others are from people who have chosen to share their story with us. Some names have been changed.

The thinking tools in this booklet were adapted from [thinkaboutyourlife.org](https://www.thinkaboutyourlife.org). People who have had cancer developed them. You can find examples and support to use the tools on the thinkaboutyourlife website.

If you'd like to discuss this information, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. If you're hard of hearing, you can use textphone **0808 808 0121**, or Text Relay. For non-English speakers, interpreters are available. Alternatively, visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

See pages 53–57 for some useful addresses, helpful books and websites.



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Cancer and relationships

Finding out that you or your partner has cancer can be a very emotional time. You may have many different feelings including shock, grief, anger and anxiety.

Some people find their relationship changes because of cancer. This is a stressful time and disagreements and misunderstandings are not unusual. For some couples, working through these and facing cancer together makes their relationship stronger. You may find that you feel closer and value your love for one another more. But not all relationships become stronger.

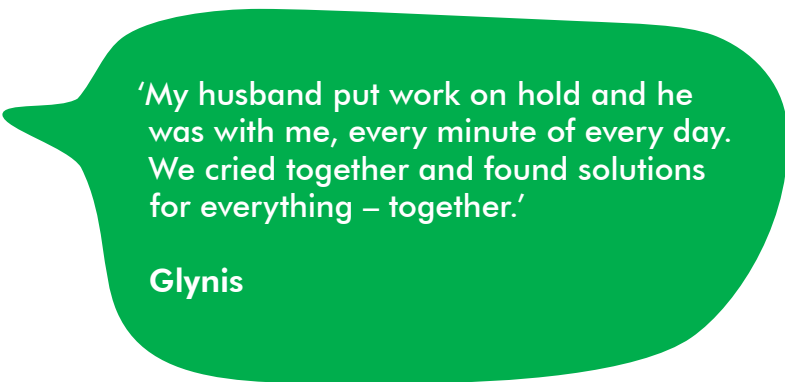
Nearly all couples feel more stress than usual. You may be coping with:

- difficult feelings (see pages 6–12)
- changes in your roles (see pages 20–25)
- making decisions (see pages 26–31)
- what to tell other people, including children (see pages 33–36)
- changes in your sex life (see pages 37–41)
- worries about money or work (see pages 42–43).

We all have our own ways of coping. You and your partner may react differently. We hope the information in this booklet will help you to find ways to support each other.

Here are some tips:

- Talk to each other about how you feel and what matters to you.
- Be aware you may both have a range of difficult feelings and that these are normal.
- Make time for each other. Take time to do and talk about things other than cancer.
- Work out how you cope as a couple. It might be laughing or crying together to help release tension.
- Don't isolate yourselves. Ask for support and be open to help from friends and family.
- Try to keep to daily routines. These can give you a sense of normality and help prevent you from feeling overwhelmed.



'My husband put work on hold and he was with me, every minute of every day. We cried together and found solutions for everything – together.'

Glynis

Your feelings

Cancer can cause a wide range of feelings including grief, anger, and uncertainty. You and your partner may both have these feelings but may have them at different times. You may each have good days when you feel positive, and bad days when your fears and worries are stronger.

Shock

To begin with, you may find the diagnosis difficult to take in. Everything can seem unreal. You might think it can't be true. You may feel numb and find it difficult to express any emotion. This is natural. It can take time to take in the news and get over the shock.

Denial

Some people appear to deny what is happening as they just want to carry on as normal. Doing this is a way of coping and may give you some time to adjust. But it can also stop you from getting the help you need. If you are struggling, it can help to think about your needs. Then think about what support from others you would like.

Grief and loss

You may feel sad for the loss of the life you and your partner had before cancer. You may feel you have lost the certainty that you had about the future. It's important to allow yourself to grieve for these losses.

Anxiety and uncertainty

You'll probably feel anxious about the future, the treatment and how you're both going to cope. Cancer can take away your sense of security and control. Feeling uncertain about the future can be one of the most difficult things to deal with.

It can be helpful to recognise when you have these feelings. And look after yourself when you feel this way. Try to focus on the things you can change or influence. This is better than putting a lot of energy into trying to change things you can't control.

Anger

Many people feel irritable or angry. Anger can hide other feelings, such as fear or sadness. You may direct your anger at your partner because you're close to them. You may both feel resentful of the changes that the cancer has made to your lives.

'Since diagnosis, I've been his primary emotional and practical support. I'm tired of making all the effort, staying at his all the time, and seeing his friends. I feel like the cancer has unbalanced the relationship. I also feel like I don't have much life left.'

Jen



Guilt

Feeling guilty is common. If you have cancer, you may feel guilty about how it has affected your life and the people close to you.

If your partner has cancer, you may feel guilty about finding it hard to cope or about feeling angry or resentful.

When people feel guilty, they tend to hide their feelings and worries more. This can make it difficult for people to understand what you are going through.

Sadness

Sadness is a natural response when you or someone you care about has cancer. Everyone has good and bad days. It's not reasonable to expect yourself to feel positive or happy all the time. It's important to be kind to yourself and look after yourself when you feel sad.

Sadness can come and go. You may feel sad even at times when you would usually enjoy yourself.

Sometimes people can become depressed. Symptoms of depression can include:

- feeling sad or numb for weeks or more without any relief
- struggling to enjoy things you would usually get pleasure from
- sleeping problems
- difficulty concentrating or making decisions.

If you think you or your partner may be depressed, talk to your GP. There are effective treatments that could help. You can also contact some of the organisations listed on pages 53–55.



Our booklet *How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer* has more information about to manage difficult feelings. Call us on 0808 808 00 00 to order a free copy.

Getting support

You will both find your own way of dealing with your emotions. It's important to remember that negative feelings and thoughts often pass. But you may still have good days and bad days.

Try to get yourself the support and information you need early on. This can help you build ways of coping and prevent things becoming more difficult. If your feelings are overwhelming or you are depressed, it is important to get professional help.

If your partner has cancer, you may think you should ignore your feelings to focus on your partner's needs. If you have cancer, you may try to protect your partner by denying your feelings. But it's hard to block feelings for a long time. You will both need support to cope with your feelings.

It can help to talk about your feelings with other people outside your relationship. There may be a friend or relative you usually talk to about important issues or difficult problems.

You may also find it helps to talk to one of the cancer team about how you are feeling. Cancer nurse specialists can be a great source of support.

Sharing your experiences with other people who are in a similar situation can also help. You may want to go along to a support group, either on your own or with your partner. Most cancer support groups welcome partners. Ask your cancer nurse about support groups in your area. You can also search for a group near you at **[macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups)**

If you are lesbian, gay or transgender you may feel unsure whether you will feel welcome or understood in mainstream support groups. Your specialist nurse may be able to tell you whether there are LGBT-friendly support groups in your area. You can also go to our online community's LGBT lounge. It's for people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or any other minority sexuality or gender identity. You can also find organisations that offer support on page 55.

Many people find it useful to share their experiences. You can do this through Macmillan's online community at **[macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)**

Counselling

Sometimes it is easier to talk in confidence to someone who isn't directly involved in your life.

Many people see a counsellor or psychologist to help them cope with their reactions to cancer. Counselling can also help you:

- cope with changes in your relationships
- think through your beliefs and what is important to you
- deal with practical problems
- find new ways of coping that you hadn't thought of before.

You can find out about counselling through:

- the cancer team at the hospital
- your GP
- contacting a counselling organisation directly (see pages 53–54).

'Sometimes talking these things over with a stranger is easier because they are more emotionally detached.'

Faith

Communication

You are both dealing with a stressful situation and may be unsure how to support each other. Make time to talk and share your feelings with each other. This can help you understand each other better and feel closer.

People have their own ways of coping when faced with a stressful situation. You may see changes in your partner's personality. Try to tackle any issues with your relationship rather than ignoring them.

Talking

Sometimes people don't want to talk about their feelings in case it upsets their partner. But it's alright to allow yourselves to be sad and upset. This is a natural reaction when you are coping with cancer in your lives.

Discussing your fears or concerns can help put your feelings into perspective. Talking about your feelings may make it easier for your partner to do the same.

There may be times when you or your partner may want to be left alone to sort out your thoughts and feelings. Be open with your partner about when it's hard to talk. There are suggestions for other ways you can share your feelings with each other on pages 16–17.

It's also important for you as a couple to have conversations about things other than cancer. There will be times when you prefer to talk about everyday subjects such as friends, sport or TV.

Listening

Listening is just as important as talking. We all like to feel we've been heard, especially when talking about a serious issue.

You may feel helpless and unsure how to comfort your partner. But just listening to them when they want to talk can make a real difference. You don't need to have all the answers – listening can be enough.

Listening and talking can help you both understand what the other person is feeling.

Tips for talking and listening

- Give yourselves time and space. Don't try to talk when one of you is busy or tired. Choose a time and place when you will be able to talk without being interrupted.
- Talking about feelings and serious issues can be tiring. Set a limit on how long you will talk together. Perhaps plan to do something nice together afterwards.
- When your partner is talking, pay attention to what they're saying. Don't get caught up in thinking about what you're going to say next.
- Encourage your partner to keep talking. Make encouraging noises such as, 'Mmm', or, 'Uh huh'. And say things like, 'What happened next?'.
- You can also repeat back what you've heard. This helps you check you've got it right and shows you're listening. You might say things like, 'So you mean that...?'.

Our booklet **Talking about cancer – a guide for people with cancer** covers how to talk about your feelings and get the support you need if you have cancer. Our booklet **Talking with someone who has cancer** has advice on how to support someone through cancer.

There may be times when you want to talk but your partner doesn't. When this happens, talking to family or friends may help you feel supported. It is good for both of you to have support from other people as well as from each other. You can also call Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to one of our cancer support specialists. We are here Monday to Friday, from 9am to 8pm.



Different ways of showing feelings

You and your partner may have different ways of expressing your feelings. Sometimes this may lead to misunderstandings. It may help to remind yourself that everyone reacts differently.

Some people find it easy to talk about their feelings. But not everyone is comfortable with this. Some people show their feelings in other ways. They may show their love by:

- hugs, touch and cuddles
- doing practical things like cooking a meal or looking after the house
- buying you thoughtful gifts.

Write down how you feel

Some people find it easier to express their feelings in writing. If talking is difficult for you, you could write your feelings down for your partner to read. This may help them to understand you better.

You and your partner may want to use the tool opposite. It can help you to explain your needs to each other.



The thinking tools in this booklet were written by people affected by cancer. You can find more tools, stories and help using the tool at thinkaboutyourlife.org

If you have any comments about the thinking tools, please email cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk

At this time	When I say or do	It means	And I want you to
Any time	I cry	I must be feeling really bad and overwhelmed	Don't try to fix it – just let me be, and if I know you well, a hug may help

Dealing with difficulties

When you are both under stress, misunderstandings and disagreements are not unusual.

Here are some practical tips to help you manage any disagreements:

- Try to acknowledge each other's feelings.
- Don't assume you know what your partner thinks or wants – ask them.
- Allow your partner to talk about how they feel, even if you disagree.
- If you can't agree on an issue, you can agree to disagree.
- Avoid 'all or nothing' 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 talking about how you feel using 'I statements' like 'I feel'.
- Avoid criticising your partner's character. Say how their actions made you feel instead. Instead of saying, 'You are thoughtless – I have to remember everything', try saying, 'I feel stressed when I have a lot to remember'.
- Try to see your partner's side of the argument.
- Write down your feelings. This can help you put things into perspective.

If the cancer can't be cured

If the cancer is not curable, this is incredibly difficult for both of you. But try not to withdraw from your partner or stop communicating with them. You will need one another now more than ever.

Sometimes talking to someone else can help – perhaps a relative, friend or someone completely outside your situation, like a counsellor.

'Going through something like this is incredibly bonding. We've sat up in the middle of the night with pots of tea and tears, and we've laughed and cried together. It's made us value each other in a way we didn't know was possible.'

Betsy

Changes in your role

After a cancer diagnosis, how you behave together as a couple may change. There may be changes in the roles each of you has in the relationship.

This can include how you divide up housework, financial and caring roles. If you have children, you will also be thinking about how this will affect them and how to deal with this.

These changes can be challenging for both of you. And it may change the balance of your relationship. It's important to talk to each other about how you feel and what matters to you.

If you have cancer

During cancer treatment, you may need to take time off work. And you may not be able to do as much at home. Your social life may be affected too.

Doing things we are good at or familiar with makes us feel useful and positive about ourselves. If you're not able to do these things for a time, it can affect your confidence. You may worry about losing control or losing your place in the family.

You may find it hard to accept support. Or, you may feel frustrated or guilty about not being able to do more. You might push yourself to do more even though you don't feel up to it.

If your partner has cancer

You may feel helpless or unsure how to comfort your partner. You may be unsure about how you will manage with caring responsibilities.

There may be changes you need to make at work and at home. Juggling new roles and extra demands on your time can be tiring. You may struggle sometimes, especially if your own needs are not being met.

These are normal reactions. You are going through your own experience of the cancer even though it is not you who has been diagnosed. It is important to make time to look after yourself as well as your partner.

You will have a lot to cope with. It may help to draw up a list of priorities. Try not to become defined by your caring role. Be aware that it's alright to ask for help for yourself as well as for your partner.

'My husband and extended family were brilliant at letting me do the things I could, helping me with the things I needed help with and being ready to catch me when I did too much.'

Daloni

Supporting each other

Many couples find it helps to work together as a team. Together you can plan what tasks need to take priority and what help you both may need. Try to find ways you can help each other so that both of you feel cared for.

It's important to think about what support you can get from other people. Family and close friends often want to help. They may be able to help you with some everyday jobs you no longer have time for. See pages 34–36 for ideas about getting support from your friends and family.

If you have cancer

Let your partner know how they can support you. They may want to do more but they may be unsure how to help. There may be things that are a priority for you to keep control over. Tell them if there are things you would enjoy doing, either alone or together.

Let them know:

- what you feel able to do
- what you would like to do
- how they can help you.

Use the tool opposite to give your partner a summary of what is important to you. This could be anything from keeping up with a hobby to what you like to eat or drink. In the second column, write down how your partner can support you. This way your partner will know what support you find helpful.

What is important to me...

How best to support me...

What is important to me...	How best to support me...

You can also tell your partner if there are things you want to help with. But agree how you let your partner know if you are having a bad day and don't feel able to do certain things.

Remember to tell your partner that you appreciate their efforts to help. This will let them know you understand it's a difficult time for them too.

If your partner has cancer

Try to be yourself and live as normally as possible. Behaving differently can make your partner feel more aware of their condition.

It can help to ask your partner what support they would like and find useful. This will let you focus your help where it is most wanted and needed. It can also help you avoid misunderstandings.

Let your partner know that although you are there to help, they are still in control. Make a point of asking whether they need you to do something. Let them take as much responsibility as they are able to for their own care, family issues, finances and other decisions.

Making time for you as a couple

Sharing activities that you both enjoy is one way of maintaining your closeness as a couple. Many people prioritise the things they think they should do, such as household chores. Because of this, they may not have the energy to do things that give them joy. But doing things you enjoy is just as important. It helps to balance out the impact of the cancer.

Make time to do things together that are not about the cancer. You may want to:

- share common interests
- go for a meal
- watch a film
- do things together as a family
- take a holiday.

This can remind you what you like about each other and what brought you together as a couple.

'My husband cooked me a delicious dinner and ran me a bath to soak some aches away. Those wedding vows were more than mere words!'

Faith

Making decisions

After a cancer diagnosis, there may be lots of things you need to think about as a couple. These may include making decisions about work, money, managing the household and childcare.

We have information about practical issues such as money and work we can send you. We can send you free copies of our booklets or you can find this information on our website **macmillan.org.uk**

When you are making decisions, try to listen to each other's opinions with an open mind.

Decision making tool

You can use the tool opposite to help you think about the decisions you need to make and who you want to be involved.

Decisions to be made	Who I want to be involved	Who makes the final decision

If you have cancer

You may want to involve your partner in any treatment decisions you need to make. Talking things over with your partner can help them understand your thoughts and feelings. But the final decision is yours.

You may find our booklet **Making treatment decisions** useful.

Finding out about cancer and treatments

The best source of information is your cancer team. They can give you information that fits your situation.

Many hospitals have information centres. These provide face-to-face information as well as free booklets and leaflets. You can also find cancer information online. Not all information online is accurate. There is a list of some reliable cancer information websites on pages 53–55.

You may want to know as much as possible about the cancer and treatment. Or you may only want to know just enough to make decisions about your immediate treatment and how to cope with it. Some people choose not to know very much. They ask their doctors to tell them what needs to be done.

There isn't one right or wrong answer to how much information you need. It is about what is right for you. This may change at different times during your treatment. You have the right to decide how much you know and when. Let your care team know what you prefer. Your partner and others should respect your choices.

You and your partner may have different feelings about how much information is needed. This is quite common. It can be useful to talk together about how you can manage this.

Doctors and nurses can't give your partner any information about your diagnosis or treatment without your permission. But you can tell the doctor you are happy for treatment information to be shared with your partner. The doctor can then record this in your case notes. You don't have to be married or in a civil partnership to do this.

Your partner may want information so they can support you better and to help them cope. Going to appointments with you is a good way for your partner to know what is happening.

'My partner has been to every appointment with me since diagnosis and has got fully involved, especially at the times when I've felt too ill to bother. He's read up on things with me and he's encouraged me to do things. What he hasn't done is treat me like I'm incapable.'

Jim

Your partner can:

- help you to remember what your cancer doctor said
- talk things over with you when you are making decisions
- be prepared for possible treatment side effects you may have
- share information with family and friends (with your permission).

If you are lesbian, gay or bisexual

Sometimes people find that their doctor or nurse assumes that they are heterosexual. You may choose to let your doctor or nurse know about your sexuality. This may make it easier if your partner comes to appointments with you. Having your relationship acknowledged can mean you both feel more supported.

'I am an 'out' lesbian woman and have found that my medical staff have taken this fact in their stride without any awkwardness.'

Jean

If your partner has cancer

Your information needs may be different from your partner's. It's best to let your partner find out information at their own pace and respect their choices. If you go to hospital appointments with your partner, talk to them about how much you can be involved. They may be happy for you to ask the doctor questions but it's best to check in advance.



You can find information about all aspects of cancer on our website at [macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support)

If you disagree

Sometimes couples don't agree about treatment decisions. This can be hard for both of you. If this happens, you may find it useful to talk to the cancer doctor or specialist nurse together. This will help both of you to be sure you understand all the options.

If your partner has cancer, they have the right to make their own choices. Try to see it from their point of view and support their decision. Sometimes this can be difficult. It may help to talk about your feelings with someone who is not involved in your relationship. Your GP or partner's specialist nurse may be able to arrange for you to see a counsellor to do this.



Involving other people

Telling other people

If you have cancer

When you first learn that you have cancer, you and your partner may need time to adjust before you tell anyone else. This is natural.

Telling other people can be hard to begin with. But it will also mean that you and your partner can get the extra support you need. If you find it too hard to tell others, you may want to ask your partner or someone else to do this. Let them know what information you are happy for them to share. Also tell them if there is any information you don't want to share.

It can be tiring to contact every family member or friend after every test result or doctor's appointment. You may want to ask one person to be responsible for doing this. This may be your partner or someone else you know and trust.

If your partner has cancer

If you need support from family or close friends but your partner is not ready to tell other people about the cancer, it can be difficult to deal with. When to share their diagnosis is your partner's decision. But you have your own needs. Try talking to your partner about why it would help you to have support from other people. They might agree to you telling a close friend or family member in confidence. Or they might set a date for beginning to tell other people, such as after test results come back. You can also contact us. We are available to talk over the phone or online when you need us. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or join our online community at **[macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)**

Children and teenagers

If you have children, you may find it hard to know what to tell them and may be worried about upsetting them. But talking to them about the cancer will help them to understand what is going on. It can also help them feel more prepared for the changes you face as a family and to feel supported.

Whether your children are young or are teenagers, talking about the cancer helps them to cope. It can also help you to carry on with family life, as much as possible, despite the cancer.

Our booklet **Talking to children and teenagers when an adult has cancer** gives support and helpful advice.

Support from family and friends

You don't have to cope with everything on your own. Think about the kind of help you both might need from your family, friends and neighbours.

Often people want to do something but are unsure how to offer their help. They may be waiting for you to ask. If you seem to be coping with everything, your family and friends may not realise how much you need their help.

Some people may want to help with practical things. Others may be good listeners and let you or your partner talk about your worries. Having other people you can talk to can be good for you and your relationship.

You may find the tool opposite helpful. Think about the people in your life who can offer you emotional and practical support.

Who is closest to you?

Think about the people in your life who can give you real emotional and practical support. These are people you can depend on and who you trust.

Who is also part of your life?

Think about family and friends who care about you and can support you. Include your colleagues and health professionals.

Try making a list of things that you need help with. For example, it could be:

- help with shopping
- taking the children to and from school
- collecting prescriptions.

You could stick the list to your fridge or note it in your mobile phone.

You could then ask people what they would be able to do. Some people may be able to help regularly for a few hours a week. Others may prefer to help every now and again. Some family member or friends may avoid you altogether. This can be difficult and hurtful. It may be because they don't know what to say or do. You could invite them to ask questions. Being open about the cancer with them may help them to overcome their fears.

Sometimes offers of help may come from people who can't offer the support you need. Or from people who you and your partner don't want help from. It's okay to turn down offers of help.

You may find our website [The Source](http://TheSource.org.uk) helpful. It's where people affected by cancer and their families and friends share their experiences. They also give practical tips about living with cancer. Visit source.macmillan.org.uk

Your sex life

Cancer and its treatment can often affect sexuality. But it doesn't have to mean an end to sex and intimacy. Many people with cancer still have sexual feelings and enjoy a fulfilling sex life.

During treatment, you may both be tired and focussing on getting through treatment. This can mean that sex is less of a priority. But for some people, sex may become more important.

Sometimes fears about cancer can put people off having sex. But cancer cannot be passed on through sex. And having sex will not affect how well a cancer treatment works.

Possible effects on your sex life

Sexuality can be affected by:

- physical effects such as tiredness or feeling sick
- your thoughts and feelings about your body (body image)
- emotional changes such as depression or anxiety
- changes in your relationship.

'I know that Paul is just too tired to think about intimacy and a lot of the time his stoma makes him feel very unattractive.'

Jess

Some cancer treatments may directly affect the ability to have sex or orgasms. This can happen if a treatment affects the sex organs or their nerves and blood vessels. It can also happen if you have a treatment that affects the balance of sex hormones in your body.

Treatments that may have this effect include:

- hormonal therapy
- radiotherapy to the area between your hips (pelvis)
- surgery to the area between your hips (pelvis).

We have more information on how treatments can affect sexuality and what can be done to help. You can order our booklets **Cancer and sexuality for men** and **Cancer and sexuality for women**.

If you have cancer

If cancer or its treatment is causing side effects, such as pain or sickness, you may not feel like having sex.

Your cancer nurse may be able to suggest things that can help. For example, if you have pain, taking painkilling medicines before having sex.

Before you have a treatment, your doctor will tell you if it could affect you sexually. They can also tell you:

- what can be done to reduce the chances of this happening
- what may help if your sex life is affected.

There are treatments your doctor or nurse can prescribe to help with sexual difficulties. You can also ask to be referred to a sexual therapist for expert advice.

Some cancer treatments may affect how you look. This can change how you think and feel about your body. This is called your body image. Changes you can't see, such as infertility, can also affect your body image and your self confidence. If your body image changes, you may feel less sexually confident or have less desire for sex. Our booklet **Body image and cancer** has more information. It talks about things you can do to adjust and build your confidence if your body image changes.

Dealing with difficult emotions may also cause you to lose interest in sex. Or you may feel too tired stressed to want sex.

The balance of your relationship may change during treatment. You may have different roles from before. This can alter how you see yourself and your partner. It may also affect how you feel about yourself sexually.

If your partner has cancer

You may feel too tired and stressed to want sex. If your partner has had surgery or is in pain, you may worry about hurting them during sex. Or you may feel guilty for wanting sex when your partner is not well.

Changes in your partner or in your relationship can also affect your desire for sex. Some people find it difficult to be a carer for their partner and still think about them sexually.

What can help?

There are different things that can help couples have a fulfilling sex life:

- Talk to your partner about sex. Tell them what you would like and what you don't want. This can help prevent misunderstandings and distance between you.
- If cancer treatment has caused sexual difficulties, tell your cancer doctor or nurse. There may be things they can suggest or prescribe that can help. Sexual therapists can also help individuals or couples who have sexual difficulties.
- Make time for yourself and your partner (see page 25). Spending time together doing things you both enjoy can help rebalance your relationship.
- If touch is important to you, use touch to show your feelings for each other. Holding each other close or using massage are both ways of physically showing your love.
- If there are things you can't do sexually or no longer enjoy, be prepared to experiment. You may find new and satisfying ways to give and receive sexual pleasure. Allow yourself to focus on your own needs and desires. You can change your mind about what you enjoy. Try to find new things that are pleasurable. Try communicating in new ways.

- If you feel self-conscious about how you look, talking with your partner about how you feel can help you regain some confidence. Focus on a part of your body that you like and use this to build confidence in your body. Making love while partly dressed, keeping the lighting low or using candlelight may help.

There are organisations that can help couples who are having problems with their sex life (see pages 53–54). Although it can be difficult to talk about at first, most people find it helpful to get some advice and support.

Work and money

If you have cancer you may need to take time off during treatment, work fewer hours or you may give up work altogether. Or you may want to work less but feel you need to carry on working as much as possible for financial reasons.

If your partner has cancer, you may want to give up work in order to look after them.

If work has been a major focus of your life, stopping work can be difficult for you both to adjust to. If you are both at home all day, it will take time to get used to being with each other all of the time.

We have more information about your rights at work including returning to work after cancer in our booklets **Work and cancer** and **Working while caring for someone with cancer**.


If you or your partner work fewer hours, this can affect your income. You may be entitled to benefits and financial support if you are affected by cancer or are caring for someone with cancer.

Macmillan's cancer support specialists can offer advice to people with cancer, their family, and carers who need help to access benefits and other forms of financial support. They can look at your individual situation and find the best solutions for you. Our booklet **Help with the cost of cancer** also has more details.

Call the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00**. You can also call this number to speak to one of our Financial Guides, who can advise you on your financial situation and give advice on insurance and pensions. Getting advice early on may save you a lot of time and worry.

You could also speak to your local Citizens Advice. See pages 54–55 for contact details.





**'My husband,
my rock, my carer.
We celebrated
together when
I was given the
'all clear'.'**

Glynis

After treatment

For some people, the end of treatment means they're not likely to need treatment for that cancer ever again. Others may be having ongoing treatment, such as hormonal therapy, to reduce the risk of the cancer coming back. And for some people, treatment is about managing the cancer for as long as possible.

The end of treatment is often a time when both of you can begin to recover. But the speed of recovery may be different for each of you. For people who have had cancer, recovery is often a gradual process. It can take time to regain and rebuild physical and emotional health. Most people who have had cancer will continue to need support during this period.

If your roles changed during cancer treatment, some of these may return to how they were before. Or, you may want to do things differently.

You may find you have different priorities than before. Or you may be thinking about positive changes you can make in your lives, such as keeping active or eating healthily. We have more information on this we can send you.

Over time, you'll gradually find yourselves getting back into the routine of everyday life. Other things start taking over and cancer becomes less of a focus for both of you.

Our booklet **Life after cancer treatment** has more information. We can send you a free copy.



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About our information

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

Order what you need

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

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

All of our information is also available online at [macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation). There you'll also find videos featuring real-life 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
- ebooks
- large print
- translations.

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

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

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That's why we always involve them in our work. If you've been affected by cancer, you can help us improve our information.

We give you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, leaflets and fact sheets.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@macmillan.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like, and we don't ask for any special skills – just an interest in our cancer information.



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you. No one should face cancer alone.

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 free, confidential phone line is open Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

- help with any medical questions you have about your cancer or treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial advice
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **[macmillan.org.uk/talktous](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/talktous)**

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. There, you can speak with someone face to face.

Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence.

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

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's why we help to bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

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

The Macmillan healthcare team

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.

'Everyone is so supportive on the online community, they know exactly what you're going through. It can be fun too. It's not all just chats about cancer.'

Mal

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you've been affected in this way, we can help.

Financial guidance

Our financial guidance team can give you advice on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.

Help accessing benefits

Our benefits advisers can offer advice and information on benefits, tax credits, grants and loans. They can help you work out what financial help you could be entitled to. They can also help you complete your forms and apply for benefits.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing to a much-needed break.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport) to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you're 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://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)



Macmillan's My Organiser app

This free mobile app can help you manage your treatment, from appointment times and contact details, to reminders for when to take your medication. Search 'My Organiser' on the Apple App Store or Google Play on your phone.

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

Relationship and counselling organisations

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth LE17 4HB

Tel 01455 883 300

Email bacp@bacp.co.uk

www.bacp.co.uk

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services. You can search for a qualified counsellor at **itsgoodtotalk.org.uk**

College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists

COSRT, PO Box 13686, London SW20 9ZH

Tel 020 8543 2707

Email info@cosrt.org.uk

www.cosrt.org.uk

Membership organisation for therapists specialising in sexual

and relationship issues, with a directory of therapists across the UK.

Relate

Premier House, Carolina Court, Lakeside, Doncaster DN4 5RA

Tel 0300 100 1234

www.relate.org.uk

Offers advice, relationship counselling, sex therapy, workshops, mediation, consultations and support face-to-face, by phone and through its website.

Relate Northern Ireland

3rd & 4th Floors, 3 Glengall Street, Belfast BT12 5AB

Tel 028 9032 3454

Email office@relateni.org

www.relateni.org

Offers relationship counselling for couples, families and individuals.

Relationships Scotland

18 York Place,

Edinburgh EH1 3EP

Tel 0845 119 2020

Email enquiries@relationships-scotland.org.uk

www.relationships-scotland.org.uk

Offers relationship counselling to individuals and couples from across Scotland.

Carers organisations

Carers UK

20 Great Dover Street,

London SE1 4LX

Tel 020 7378 4999

Carers line 0808 808 7777

(Weds and Thurs, 10am to 12pm and 2 to 4pm)

Email info@carersuk.org

www.carersuk.org

Offers information and support to carers. Can put people in contact with local support groups. Has national offices for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales:

Carers Northern Ireland

58 Howard Street,

Belfast BT1 6PJ

Advice line 028 9043 9843

Email info@carersni.org

www.carersni.org

Carers Scotland

The Cottage, 21 Pearce Street,
Glasgow G51 3UT

Tel 0141 445 3070

Email info@carerscotland.org

www.carerscotland.org

Carers Wales

River House, Ynsbridge Court,

Gwaelod-y-Garth,

Cardiff CF15 9SS

Tel 029 2081 1370

Email info@carerswales.org

www.carerswales.org

Citizens Advice

Provides advice on a variety of issues including financial, legal, housing and employment.

Find contact details for your local office in the phone book or on the following websites:

England and Wales

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Scotland

www.cas.org.uk

Northern Ireland **www.citizensadvice.co.uk**

You can also find advice online in a range of languages at **adviceguide.org.uk**

LGBT organisations

LGBT Foundation **www.lgbt.foundation**

A national charity delivering a wide range of services to lesbian, gay and bisexual and trans (LGBT) communities.

Pink Therapy **www.pinktherapy.com**

The UK's largest independent therapy organisation working with gender and sexual diversity clients. Therapists have many years' experience of working with sexual diversity clients.

General cancer organisations

Macmillan Cancer Voices **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.

National Cancer Institute – National Institute of Health – USA

www.cancer.gov

Gives information on cancer and treatments.

NHS Choices **www.nhs.uk**

The UK's biggest health website. It gives all the information you need to make decisions about your health.



You can search for more organisations on our website at **macmillan.org.uk/organisations** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Helpful books and leaflets

You may find some of the books and leaflets helpful. Some are available for free online, others you have to pay for.

Resources you can buy

The selfish pig's guide to caring (Hugh Marriot)

Written by a former carer, this book talks about the emotions carers may have, including guilt and isolation. It also covers issues such as sex and dealing with friends and healthcare professionals.

Their cancer – your journey: a traveller's guide for carers, family and friends (Anne Orchard)

This book contains practical advice and guidance for coping when someone close is diagnosed with cancer. The author supported her own mother through cancer.

What can I do to help? 75 practical ideas for family and friends from cancer's frontline (Deborah Hutton)

Gives practical examples of ways in which friends and family can help someone close to them who has cancer. The author is a cancer survivor.

Free resources

In it together: for partners of people with breast cancer (Breast Cancer Care – available for free online)

This booklet is for anyone who is in a relationship with someone who has been diagnosed with breast cancer. It offers tips for partners to look after both themselves and the person with cancer.

When you're close to a man with prostate cancer: a guide for partners and family (Prostate Cancer UK – available for free online)

This booklet looks at ways partners and family members can support a man with prostate cancer, how they can get further information and support and how they can look after themselves.

Intimacy and sexuality for cancer patients and their partners: a booklet of tips and ideas for your journey of recovery (Sexual Advice Association - available for free online)

This booklet explores how sexuality may be affected for someone with cancer or their partner. It has tips and ideas for dealing with issues.

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.

Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by Dr Tim Iveson, Consultant Medical Oncologist and Macmillan Chief Medical Editor.

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Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and those who shared their stories.

Sources

We've listed a sample of the sources used in this publication below. If you'd like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at [**bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk**](mailto:bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk)

Lockley, A. Improving the cancer journey for lesbian, gay and bisexual people living with cancer. De Montford University. April 2015.

Miller, L. "We're going to be survivors": how couples cope together with cancer. *Communication Currents*, 8 (2). April 2013.

Traa, M; et al. Dyadic coping and relationship functioning in couples coping with cancer: a systematic review. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 20, 85–114. 2015.

Can you do something to help?

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



Share your cancer experience

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

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.

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?

Raise money

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

Give money

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

Call us to find out more

0300 1000 200

macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved

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

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Signature _____

Date / / _____

Don't 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'd rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to: Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851, 89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

27530

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

We are the nurses and therapists helping you through treatment. The experts on the end of the phone. The advisers telling you which benefits you're entitled to. The volunteers giving you a hand with the everyday things. The campaigners improving cancer care. The community there for you online, any time. The supporters who make it all possible.

Together, we are all Macmillan Cancer Support.

For cancer support every step of the way, call Macmillan on 0808 808 00 00 (Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm) or visit macmillan.org.uk

Hard of hearing? Use textphone 0808 808 0121, or Text Relay.
Non-English speaker? Interpreters available.
Braille and large print versions on request.

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CANCER SUPPORT**