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How to look after yourself during cancer treatment and chemotherapy

Getting a cancer diagnosis is many people's worst fear. But while it's important to focus on getting better, it's also just as vital to take care of yourself in the process. We ask the experts at Macmillan Cancer Care for their best advice.

When going through cancer treatment, it's not just your body which is affected; it can also put a strain on your mental health. Constantly being in and out of the hospital, not knowing how you're going to feel day to day, and even telling people that you're going through treatment, can be anxiety-inducing for some.

"These feelings can arise because of uncertainty over the future," explains Dany Bell, treatment and recovery specialist at [Macmillan Cancer Support](#). "20% of people living with cancer are affected by depression, and 10% are affected by anxiety."

In a bid to get your body back to health, it can be all too easy to forget about what's going on in your head. But your mental health is just as important as physical health when it comes to recovery.

"It's important to acknowledge the impact your cancer diagnosis can have on your mental health and to seek support from a healthcare professional if you need it," says Bell.

There is also a range of options when it comes to seeking mental health help outside of the walls of a doctor's surgery; whether that be over-the-phone, [self-referral](#) or [mental health apps](#). It's best to speak with your GP to find out which option would be best for you and your current condition.

"You can also speak about any concerns or questions with a Macmillan Cancer Support specialist on 0808 808 00 00 (seven days a week, 8 am–8 pm)," Bell points out.

Friends and family

Going through cancer treatment is scary in itself, but having to go through it alone can make it even harder. Making sure you have a good support network of loved ones around you can be really beneficial to your overall mood and progress.

Alternatively, if you know someone who is currently going through cancer, reaching out could help them more than you know. Even if it's something as simple as a [text message](#).

"Remember that your loved one is still the same person they always were, so spend time with them in the way you always have," says Bell.

"When someone close to you is diagnosed with cancer it can be an overwhelming experience and it may not always be clear how you can best support them. Talking can help make sense of the difficult experiences your loved one is going through and help you understand how you can best support them."

"Another way you may offer support is to help them prepare for their medical appointments. Help them write or prioritise their questions and if they ask you to go with them, listen carefully to what the doctor says so that nothing is missed."

Home from home

Depending on the treatment you're receiving, it could mean spending a lot of time away in hospital. With short visiting hours and restrictive activities, you might think feeling lonely and uncomfortable is to be expected. But it doesn't have to be.

If you know that you're going to be admitted for a certain period of time, whether short or long, then prioritising your comfort will certainly help.

"While the necessities are provided, bringing your own toiletries, pyjamas and a book or magazine may make you feel more comfortable. Asking a friend or family member to accompany you may help you feel less anxious and give you someone you trust to talk with about any of your worries or concerns," Bell explains.

There is also the worry of how things are going to be run at home, particularly if you live alone. Again, reaching out for support (or being reached out to) can help to calm a lot of worries and stresses that are only going to be a hindrance through this time.

"Often, it's small, practical things such as giving a lift, cooking a meal or picking up some information which can be really helpful."

Care about self-care

At the end of the day your recovery is all about you, so you should be making yourself the priority. Keeping up a good, gentle health regime will work wonders for you in the long run. Making sure you're getting the right nutrition in between treatment sessions is vital and can really make all the difference.

"It's important to look after yourself during your treatment," Bell explains. "This means eating well, getting plenty of sleep and continuing to do the things you enjoy."

"Many people find keeping active, even by going for a short walk each day, can not only reduce anxiety and boost their mood, but help with feelings of tiredness or the side effects of treatment."

Feeling sick and tired after treatments is very common, so it can often be hard to maintain a varied diet constantly. At times like this, even just getting some calories into your body is better than nothing at all. Hearty foods like [soups](#), or readily available foods like bananas that are easy to eat and digest should be on hand for when you need them most. But most important of all is to keep your body hydrated with water, which can help combat any feelings of nausea or fatigue.

Of course, cancer recovery is not necessarily straightforward. There will be dark days, painful days, sad days and, worst of all, scary days. The main thing to remember is that there is always support out there to help get you through, and that making yourself number one should be *your* number one.

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Authored by:	Peer Reviewed by: Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, FRCGP	
Originally Published: 20/11/2023	Next review date: 08/04/2019	Document ID: doc_30854

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