

[Home](#) › [About cancer](#) › [Breast cancer](#) › [Living with breast cancer](#) ›

Coping and support when you have breast cancer

## Coping and support when you have breast cancer

You may find it difficult coping with a diagnosis of breast cancer both practically and emotionally. The following information might help you to cope.

You are likely to feel very uncertain and anxious about the future knowing you have cancer. You may find it impossible to think about anything other than having cancer.

Some people say a diagnosis of cancer helps them appreciate ordinary everyday things much more than they did.

If you have [secondary breast cancer](#) you will need to work out your priorities. Unfortunately secondary cancer can't usually be cured. But treatment can often control the cancer and relieve symptoms. So you may want to think about how you want to spend your time - what is important to you and what is not.

Some of your future plans may no longer be realistic but you do not have to abandon them all. You may be able to adapt some. And you may get round to doing something you have always wanted to do, but were not able to make time for.

Your doctors and nurses are there to help at whatever stage of your breast cancer journey. It's important to ask questions and contact them when you need them.

---

### Your feelings

You might have a number of different feelings when you're told you have cancer.

You may feel shocked and upset and find it difficult to take in anything else that is being said to you. Other emotions include feeling:

- numb
- frightened and uncertain
- confused
- angry and resentful
- guilty
- sad

You may have some or all of these feelings. Or you might feel totally different. You may feel them a few at a time or altogether, leaving you feeling exhausted.

Everyone reacts in their own way. Sometimes it's hard to take in the fact that you have cancer at all. You need to do what's right for you to help you cope.

You may think you should be talking all this through with your partner, other family members or close friends. But you may find this really hard to do.

Or you may want to talk to someone straight away to help you work out how you are feeling.

There is no set way of handling your news, but experiencing different feelings is a natural part of coming to terms with having cancer. All sorts of feelings are likely to come and go, some may even come up when you are not expecting it.

## **How you might feel with secondary breast cancer**

Finding out that you can't be cured is distressing and can be a shock. It's common to feel uncertain and anxious. It's normal to not be able to think about anything else.

Lots of information and support is available to you, your family and friends. Some people find it helpful to find out more about their cancer and the treatments they might have. Many people find that knowing more about their situation can make it easier to cope.

Talk to your doctor or specialist nurse to understand:

- what your diagnosis means
- what is likely to happen
- what treatment is available
- how treatment can help you

**[Read more about cancer and your emotions](#)**

---

## **Helping yourself**

You may be more able to cope and make decisions if you have information about your type of cancer and its treatment. Information helps you to know what to expect.

Taking in information can be difficult, especially when you have just been diagnosed or given news about your outlook. Make a list of questions before you see your doctor. Take someone with you to remind you what you want to ask. They can also help you to remember the information that was given. Getting a lot of new information can feel overwhelming.

Ask your doctors and nurse specialists to explain things again if you need them to.

You might feel that you don't want to know much information straight away. Tell your doctor or nurse. You will always be able to ask for more information when you feel ready.

Remember that you don't have to sort everything out at once. It might take some time to deal with each issue. Ask for help if you need it.

You can also do practical things such as:

- making lists to help you
- having a calendar with all appointments
- having goals
- planning enjoyable things around weeks that might be emotionally difficult for you

---

## Talking to other people

Talking to your friends and relatives about your cancer can help and support you. But some people are scared of the emotions this could bring up and won't want to talk. They might worry that you won't be able to cope with your situation or be afraid they will say the wrong thing.

It can strain relationships if your family or friends don't want to talk. But talking can help increase trust and support between you and them.

Help your family and friends by letting them know if you would like to talk about what's happening and how you feel.

### **Find out ways to help manage your emotions**

You might find it easier to talk to someone other than your own friends and family. We have cancer information nurses you can call on freephone 0808 800 4040, from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Or you may prefer to see a counsellor.

### **Read more about talking about cancer, including talking to children**

## Cancer chat

You can chat with other people affected by cancer in our online forum.

### **Visit Cancer Chat**

## Specialist nurses

You usually have a clinical nurse specialist called a breast care nurse who follows you from when you get your diagnosis, through treatment and in follow up. They can help you if you're finding it difficult to cope or if you have any problems. They can get you the help you need as well as give you information.

## Support groups

You may find it helpful to go to a support group to talk to other people affected by cancer.

### **Find breast cancer support organisations**

---

## Spiritual support

Some people find great comfort in religion. You might find it helpful to talk to:

- a local minister
- a hospital chaplain
- a religious leader of your faith

---

## Physical problems

Breast cancer and its treatments are likely to cause physical problems. These might affect the way you feel about yourself.

Changes to the shape of one or both breasts and scarring after surgery can affect your self esteem and how you relate to other people. Some women might also have some ongoing discomfort and soreness in their breast after surgery.

Some hormone treatments can also cause joint and bone pain. Talk to your doctor or nurse about this as they can prescribe medication to help.

### Tiredness

Tiredness and lethargy can be a problem during treatment. Resting but also doing some gentle physical activity can help.

**[Read about tiredness and cancer](#)**

### Menopausal symptoms

Some treatments can cause an early menopause and you might have symptoms such as hot flushes and sweats. Your nurse will talk to you about how to cope with the symptoms.

**[Find out about hot flushes and sweats](#)**

An early menopause also means that you are no longer able to become pregnant. This can be very difficult to cope with if you were hoping to have children in the future. Your doctor will talk to you about this before your treatment. It's sometimes possible to store your eggs or embryos before treatment starts.

**[Ways to try and preserve fertility](#)**

### Fear and anxiety

Feelings of fear or panic can be overwhelming at times. There are things you can do to help you cope with such difficult emotions.

**[How to cope with fear, anxiety and panic](#)**

### Relationships and sex

The physical and emotional changes you have might affect your relationships and sex life. There are things that you can do to manage this.

**[Read about cancer, relationships and sex](#)**

### Feeling as well as you can

It is important that you feel as well as you possibly can. Tell your doctor or nurse about any symptoms you have so they can help to control them.

If you have secondary breast cancer you might have a symptom control nurse or community specialist palliative care nurse. They might be called Macmillan nurses and hospice nurses. They are very experienced in controlling cancer symptoms such as pain control, sickness, and other cancer symptoms. They also provide emotional support to you and your carers.

---

## **Coping practically and financially**

Practical things you and your family might need to cope with include:

- money matters
- financial support, such as benefits, sick pay and grants
- work issues
- childcare
- Blue Badge applications
- help with travel costs
- changes to your house

Talk to your doctor or specialist nurse to find out who can help.

Getting help early with these things can mean that they don't become a big issue later. It may be helpful to see a social worker. Many hospital cancer departments have a social worker available for patients.

The social worker can let you know which benefits or grants you can claim and help with the claiming process. You might be able to get some benefits for yourself and the person caring for you. You might also be able to get grants for heating costs, holidays and other household expenses related to your illness.

**Find out more about coping with practically matters**

---

## **Support at home for you and your family**

You might need some care and support at home due to breast cancer, its treatment or when you have secondary breast cancer. A lot of practical and emotional support is available to you.

### **GP and nursing support**

Your GP manages your healthcare when you are at home. They can help with any medical problems that come up. They can also make referrals to a community service for you. The availability of the different community services may vary, depending on where you live.

### **Community or district nurse**

These nurses work in different places in your local area and may visit you in your home. They can:

- give medicines or injections
- check temperature, blood pressure and breathing
- clean and dress wounds
- monitor or set up drips
- give emotional support
- teach basic caring skills to family members where needed
- get special equipment, such as commodes or bed pans

## **Community specialist palliative care nurse**

Community specialist palliative care nurses include Macmillan nurses and hospice nurses. They specialise in symptom management such as pain control, sickness, and other cancer symptoms. They also give emotional support to you and your carers.

## **Marie Curie nurses**

Marie Curie nurses give nursing care to people with advanced cancer in their own homes. They can visit during the day or spend the night in your home to give your carers a break.

**[Read more about Marie Curie nurses](#)**

## **Social workers**

Social workers can help to support you with your situation at home. They can arrange:

- home helps to help with shopping or housework
- home care assistants for washing and dressing
- meals on wheels
- respite care

Your social worker can also help with money matters by checking you get all the benefits you are entitled to. Or they can advise you about charity grants for things like extra heating costs or special diets.

Contact a social worker yourself by getting in touch with your local social services office. Or ask your hospital nurse or your GP to refer you.

**[Find out about what financial help there is](#)**

## **Local support services**

There is usually other help available but services can vary from place to place.

Sometimes local voluntary groups offer sitting services. Someone comes to stay with you while your relative goes out.

Good neighbour schemes offer befriending or practical help with shopping or transport.

Local cancer support groups often offer practical help. And they are a good source of information about services in your area. Ask your doctor or nurse about local groups.

**[Read about the breast cancer organisations and support groups](#)**

## **Lymphoedema specialist nurses**

Some women develop lymphoedema during or after their treatment. This is a long term swelling due to fluid build up. Lymphoedema specialist nurses often run clinics and provide practical and emotional support.

**[Read about lymphoedema after breast cancer treatment](#)**

---

## Towards the end of life

It's natural to want to find out what is likely to happen in the last few weeks or days of life.

You might need to choose where you want to be looked after and who you want to care for you.

**Read our information about dying with cancer**

You can call the Cancer Research UK information nurses if you have questions or want to talk about coping with advanced cancer. Call free on 0808 800 4040, from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

---

## Life after cancer

In this video Yvonne shares her story of life after breast cancer and how she coped when her treatment finished. She talks about some of the physical effects of the cancer and its treatment and what helped her through.

She and her sister Sonia also talk about what it was like going to check up appointments, something that is not always easy. Coping after treatment finishes can be challenging and hearing about how other people cope can help.

### Hide Transcript

**Yvonne:** My name is Yvonne Pickford. I live in Birmingham and I've had breast cancer.

Sonia: Yvonne having breast cancer I feel has tightened the bond between us as sisters.

**Yvonne:** She helped me to stay strong and it was nice to have her there as my crutch

**Sonia:** When Yvonne informed me that her treatment was successful it took a while to sink in but then I thought, yes.

**Yvonne:** It is something that you just want to shout from the rooftops. I did it. And at the same time

---

## Other breast cancer stories

### Sharon's story

Sharon story is about her diagnosis, treatment and how she coped with life after cancer.

*'It is possible to regain your life and in lots of ways be stronger, happier and healthier.'*

**Read Sharon's story about her cancer and how she coped**

### Angela's story

Angela had a mammogram and was diagnosed with breast cancer.

*"I have a friend that has had breast cancer and she has helped me."*

**Read about how Angela coped with her cancer**

## JoC's story

JoC was diagnosed with lobuar cancer in 2021.

*"Tell people how you feel. Don't keep it to yourself. There's lots of us just waiting to talk and share our cancer experiences. People support is a big medicine when you're feeling low."*

**This is JoC's story about her diagnosis, treatment and coping**

## Soina's story

Sonia was diagnosed in 2020. Sonia's story is about her diagnosis and treatment.

*"I think it's always a bigger shock for family members as they fear the worst. Admittedly I cried."*

*"To be honest I felt more emotional when it was all over and probably cried more after than I did when I was first told."*

**Read Soina's story about her diagnosis and treatment**

## + References

### **Early and locally advanced breast cancer: diagnosis and treatment**

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), June 2018. Last updated June 2023

### **Improving supportive and palliative care for adults with cancer**

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), March 2004

### **Depression and anxiety among people living with and beyond cancer: a growing clinical and research priority**

C L Niedzwiedz and others

BMC Cancer, 2019. Volume 19, Page 943

### **The Palliative Care Handbook A Good Practice Guide (9th Edition)**

Wessex Palliative Physicians, 2019

### **Understanding the quality of life (QOL) issues in survivors of cancer: towards the development of an EORTC QOL cancer survivorship questionnaire**

M V Leeuwen and others

Health and Quality of Life Outcomes, 2018. Volume 16, Page 114

The information on this page is based on literature searches and specialist checking. We used many references and there are too many to list here. Please contact [patientinformation@cancer.org.uk](mailto:patientinformation@cancer.org.uk) with details of the particular issue you are interested in if you need additional references for this information.



## Related links

### **Life after breast cancer surgery**

You may find it difficult to adjust to changes after your breast cancer surgery. There is help and support available.

### **Lymphoedema after breast cancer treatment**

About 1 in 5 women get lymphoedema after breast cancer treatment. Find out how you can lower your risk of getting it and things you can do to help manage it.

### **Treatment for breast cancer**

Treatment for breast cancer depends on a number of factors. Find out about breast cancer treatments, where and how you have them, and how to cope with possible side effects.

### **Living with breast cancer**

Get practical, physical and emotional support to help you cope with a diagnosis of breast cancer, and life during and after treatment.

### **Secondary breast cancer**

Secondary breast cancer means that a cancer that began in the breast has spread to another part of the body such as the bones or lungs.

### **Breast cancer main page**

Find out about breast cancer, including symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, survival, and how to cope with the effects on your life and relationships.



It's a worrying time for many people and we want to be there for you whenever - and wherever - you need us. Cancer Chat is our fully moderated forum where you can talk to others affected by cancer, share experiences, and get support. Cancer Chat is free to join and available 24 hours a day.

**Visit the Cancer Chat forum**



About Cancer generously supported by [Dangoor Education](#) since 2010.



**Find a clinical trial**



**Cancer Chat forum**



**Nurse helpline  
0808 800 4040**

---

## Speak to a nurse

[Nurse Helpline](#)

[0808 800 4040](#)

Questions about cancer? Call freephone

9 to 5 Monday to Friday or [email us](#)

## Quick links

[Find local shops](#)

[Shop online](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Jobs](#)

## Follow us



[About our information](#)

[Terms and conditions](#)

[Privacy](#)

[Modern Slavery Statement](#)

[Cookies](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Sitemap](#)



Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666), the Isle of Man (1103) and Jersey (247). A company limited by guarantee. Registered company in England and Wales (4325234) and the Isle of Man (5713F). Registered address: 2 Redman Place, London, E20 1JQ.