

## If you are diagnosed with cancer

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

A diagnosis means finding out if you have an illness or not. Being diagnosed with cancer can be a huge shock. You may be feeling lots of different emotions. Many people are treated successfully or able to live with cancer for many years. There are lots of people and services that can support you.

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

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

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

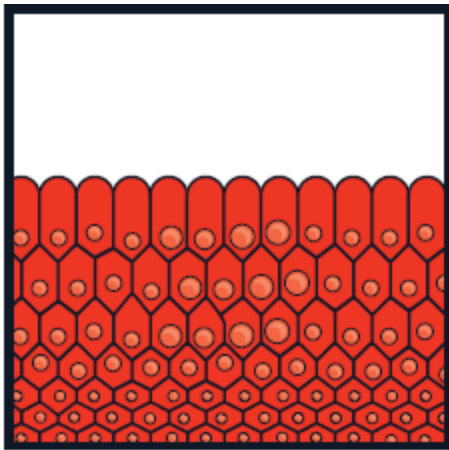
### This information is about:

- What is cancer?
- What happens after diagnosis?
- If you are LGBTQ+
- Health and social care professionals you might meet
- How treatment is planned
- The main cancer treatments
- Talking to your healthcare team
- Coping with cancer
- Getting the right care and support for you
- How Macmillan can help you
- More information in your language
- References and thanks

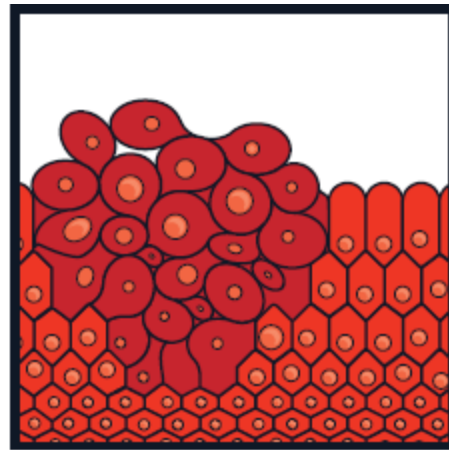
## What is cancer?

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

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



**Normal cells**



**Cells forming a tumour**

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

A tumour that is cancer is called a malignant tumour. It can grow into nearby tissue. It can also spread around the body if cancer cells break away and travel through the blood or lymphatic system. The lymphatic system is network of tubes and glands throughout the body.

Cancer cells that spread and develop into a tumour somewhere else in the body are called a secondary cancer or a metastasis. Some types of cancer start from blood cells. Abnormal cells can build up in the blood, and sometimes the bone marrow. The bone marrow is where blood cells are made. These types of cancer are sometimes called blood cancers.

## What happens after diagnosis?

After a cancer diagnosis, you meet a cancer doctor or nurse to talk about your treatment plan. They will give you information to help you make a decision about the treatment you want. You should be given the information in a language and format that you can understand.

The doctor or nurse will also explain when your treatment may start. They can talk to you about any support you need. You may need to have some more tests or scans to find out more about the cancer.

## If you are LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ means lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people. It also includes other romantic or sexual attractions and gender identities.

You do not have to tell your cancer doctor or nurse if you are LGBTQ+. But it may be an important part of who you are. It may help your cancer team give the right information and support to you and the people close to you.

You can tell your cancer team anything that is important to you. If there is something you are worried about, tell them so they can help.

Your team should treat all information about you confidentially. They may only share information with other healthcare professionals when it is needed for your care. They should not share your sexual orientation or transgender (trans) status without your permission.

For more information about being LGBTQ+ and having cancer, please see our 'LGBTQ+ people and cancer' fact sheet in your language at [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations)

## Health and social care professionals you might meet

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

### Your main contact

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

### In your local area

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

- **GP (General Practitioner)** – Your GP is a doctor who treats general health conditions. GPs usually work in a local centre. In English, this type of centre can have different names. It may be called a [GP practice], [GP surgery] or [medical centre]. They can help you manage symptoms and side effects and arrange for you to see specialists if needed. They can arrange services to help you at home and talk to you about any treatment decisions you need to make.
- **Community and district nurses** – These nurses can visit you at home and give care and support to you and anyone looking after you. Your GP can contact them for you.
- **Practice nurse** – Some GP practices have nurses who work alongside the GP. A practice nurse can help explain things to you and might do things like take blood tests or put dressings on wounds.

### Hospital team

At hospital, a multidisciplinary team (MDT) will manage your treatment and care. This is a group of health and social care professionals. The group might include some or all of these people:

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

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

### Social services and voluntary organisations

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

## How treatment is planned

Your multidisciplinary team (MDT) will discuss the treatment options they think are best for you. They will think about:

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

After this, you usually meet your cancer doctor and nurse to talk about your treatment options. No medical treatment can be given without your permission or consent. If you use another language, they should offer:

- **Professional interpreter** - Interpreters translate everything your doctor says to you, and everything you want to say back. If you would like an interpreter, tell your GP practice or hospital as soon as possible. The NHS should always use professional interpreters, rather than your family or friends. This means your family can focus on being there to support you to make a decision. It also means there is less risk of getting important information wrong.
- **Translated health information** - Your healthcare team should give you written information about health and care services in a language and format that you understand.

These services are free in the NHS.

You can also take a list of questions that you want to ask to your appointment. If it is helpful, you can write down the answers so you remember them.

## Making decisions about treatment

Your team give you information and support to help you make a decision about your treatment plan. You may need more than 1 meeting before you decide. Cancer treatments can be complex, and it is hard to understand new information when you are anxious. If you do not understand, ask your doctor or nurse to explain it again.

There might be more than one possible treatment. Your doctor may offer you a choice. Before you decide what is right for you, it is important to understand:

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

This can be a lot to think about. You can usually take some time to think things over. This may not be possible if you have a cancer that needs to be treated urgently.

## The main cancer treatments

The aim of your treatment may be to cure the cancer, or to control it or to relieve its symptoms.

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

- **surgery** – the cancer is removed in an operation
- **radiotherapy** – high-energy x-rays are used to destroy cancer cells in an area of the body
- **cancer drugs** – different types of drugs are used to destroy cancer cells throughout the body. These may include drugs called chemotherapy, targeted therapy or immunotherapy.
- **hormonal therapies** – drugs that change the activity of hormones in the body are used to slow down or stop the cancer from growing.

### **Clinical trials**

Clinical trials are a type of medical research involving people. They show which treatments are most effective and safe. A trial might involve testing a new drug or testing a new way of giving treatment.

If there are any trials that you can take part in, your doctor will talk to you about them. You can choose not to take part in a trial. You will still be offered the standard treatment and care for your situation.

### **Side effects**

Cancer treatments can cause side effects. For example, some treatments may cause hair loss, feeling sick or tiredness. Side effects can often be reduced and managed. Your cancer team will give you advice. Most side effects get better after treatment finishes.

## **Talking to your healthcare team**

You may have lots of questions about your treatment. Talking to your cancer doctor, nurse or someone else in your healthcare team can help you understand what is happening and why. Your healthcare team includes any doctors, nurses or other healthcare professionals that look after you. They are there to help you find the care and support you need.

Appointments and other chances to speak with your team can be short. To make the best use of your time, it is good to be prepared. It may help to write down your questions before your appointment.

You may have questions that feel difficult or embarrassing to ask. Remember healthcare professionals are used to all kinds of questions and are happy to help.

You may find it helpful to bring someone with you to appointments, such as a family member, friend or carer. They may also be able to take notes and help you to remember what is said.

If you find it hard to get your healthcare team to understand your views on treatment, someone might be able to speak on your behalf. A person who speaks on your behalf is called an advocate.

You may choose to have a friend or family member to help in this way. Or, depending on where you live in the UK, different organisations can give help and advice about advocacy.

Advocates are independent of the NHS. They can help you to:

- talk about how you feel about your treatment and to make decisions
- get your views and wishes about treatment understood by your team.

The following organisations can offer information and support about healthcare. They may have up to date information about advocacy services in your area:

- The Patients Association. Visit [www.patients-association.org.uk](http://www.patients-association.org.uk) or call their helpline free on 0800 345 7115.
- In England or Wales, the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). Visit [www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-health-services/patient-advice-and-liaison-services-pals](http://www.nhs.uk/service-search/other-health-services/patient-advice-and-liaison-services-pals) Or you can find a PALS office by asking your cancer team or GP or by phoning NHS 111.
- In Scotland, the Patient Advice and Support Service. Visit [www.pass-scotland.org.uk](http://www.pass-scotland.org.uk) Or you can find them by visiting your local Citizens Advice Bureau or by phoning 0800 917 2127
- In Northern Ireland, the Patient and Client Council. Visit [www.pcc-ni.net](http://www.pcc-ni.net) You can visit one of their local offices or call their helpline free on 0800 917 0222.

### **Questions to ask your healthcare team**

Here are some questions you may want to ask your healthcare team.

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

## **Coping with cancer**

### **Your emotions**

It is common to have many different emotions and worries when you are told you have cancer. These can be difficult to cope with. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Talking about how you feel can often help.

Where to get support:

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

### **Money, work and travel**

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

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

### **Physical changes**

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

### **Complementary therapies**

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

### **Religion and spirituality**

Many people find their faith offers them emotional support and strength during an illness. After a cancer diagnosis, some people become more aware of religious or spiritual feelings. Other people may question their faith.

You may find it helpful to talk through your thoughts and feelings with someone you trust. You can speak to a chaplain or religious leader even if you are not religious. They are usually good listeners and may be able to help you work out your thoughts and feelings. They are used to dealing with uncertainty and being with people who are distressed. Your GP, specialist nurse or cancer doctor may also be able to help you find a non-religious counsellor or pastoral carer to talk to.



## **Support for family, friends and carers**

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

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

## **Getting the right care and support for you**

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

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

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

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

## **How Macmillan can help you**

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

### **Macmillan Support Line**

We have interpreters, so you can speak to us in your language. Just tell us, in English, the language you want to use. We can help with medical questions, give you information about financial support, or be there to listen if you need someone to talk to. The free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

### **Macmillan website**

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

We can also arrange translations just for you. Email us at **[cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk)** to tell us what you need.

## Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and community centres. Visit one to get the information you need and speak with someone face to face. Find your nearest centre at [macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Local support groups

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

## Macmillan Online Community

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

## More information in your language

We have information in your language about these topics:

### Coping with cancer

- Cancer and coronavirus
- Cancer care in the UK
- Claiming benefits when you have cancer
- Eating problems and cancer
- End of life
- Healthcare for refugees and people seeking asylum
- Healthy eating
- Help with costs when you have cancer
- If you are diagnosed with cancer
- LGBTQ+ people and cancer
- Sepsis and cancer

- Side effects of cancer treatment
- Tiredness (fatigue) and cancer

### Types of cancer

- Breast cancer
- Cervical cancer
- Large bowel cancer
- Lung cancer
- Prostate cancer

### Treatments

- Chemotherapy
- Radiotherapy
- Surgery

To see this information, go to [macmillan.org.uk/translations](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/translations)

## References and thanks

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

The information included is based on our treatment decisions content available in English on our website.

This information has been reviewed by relevant experts and approved by members of Macmillan's Centre of Clinical Expertise.

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

All our information is based on the best evidence available. For more information about the sources we use, please contact us at [cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk)

**Content reviewed: 2023 Next planned review: 2026**

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