

Thinking about the future when you have advanced cancer

Advanced cancer is cancer that has spread or come back. It is usually used to describe cancer that cannot be cured.

It is common to have many different reactions and feelings when you find out your cancer is advanced. You may feel shocked and find it hard to understand. You may feel angry or frightened about the future.

You may worry about how you will cope as the cancer develops. You may be worried about practical issues such as your work or finances. These [feelings](#) can be difficult. They usually become easier to manage over time and as you start making decisions and plans.

Knowing that your illness may not be curable might help you think about:

- what is important to you
- how you want to live your life.

You may want to focus on things you enjoy or want to achieve.

It might also make you think about planning ahead. If you feel ready to do this, you may want to write down your wishes. This is called [advance care planning](#).

Tips for thinking ahead

- [Uncertainty](#) can be hard to deal with. It is difficult to make plans when you do not know what is going to happen. It can help to think about what you can control right now. This might include choices about your care and treatment, or how you use your time.
- Many people with advanced cancer feel frightened. Often, [talking](#) about what may or may not happen can make it less frightening. You may find your fears are worse than the reality. Talking to a professional such as a nurse or counsellor can help you plan for what might happen. This can help reduce fears.
- There are [support groups](#) for people with cancer and their families and friends. These groups mean you can talk to people who may be in a similar situation or facing the same challenges.
- If you use the internet, there are other types of online support. These include social networking sites, forums, chat rooms and blogs for people affected by cancer. You can use these to share your experiences, ask questions, and get and give advice. You might find it useful to visit our [Online Community](#).
- Many people choose to plan for a time when they are less well. It is best to write down your wishes and preferences. There are different documents you can use. For example, you may want to record your wishes about how you would like to be cared for. Or who will look after your affairs. This is called [advance care planning](#).
- Some people choose to make an [advance decision to refuse treatment](#). This is a decision about any treatments you do not want to have. It is also called an advance directive, an advance decision, or a living will.
- You may also want to make a [power of attorney](#). This is a legal document that lets you choose (appoint) someone to make decisions for you if you are unable to make them yourself. These can be legal or financial decisions. In England, Wales and Scotland, you can also appoint an attorney to make decisions about your healthcare.
- [Organising your affairs](#) is part of advance care planning. This can be difficult but when you have sorted out your affairs, you may feel relieved and more able to concentrate on the present.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Coping with advanced cancer](#)
- [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#)
- [Talking about cancer and your feelings – easy read.](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the [Relay UK app](#). Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Other useful contact details

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy – call **0145 588 3300** or visit bacp.co.uk
- Mind – call **0300 123 3393** or visit mind.org.uk

Notes and questions
