

# GETTING BACK TO 'NORMAL' AFTER TREATMENT ENDS



Just because treatment's over, it doesn't mean life suddenly goes back to normal. This is the time it can hit hardest emotionally. Let's break it down.

## Leaving hospital life behind

The familiar surroundings and routine of treatment can be key to what gets you through. The care and attention from doctors, nurses, care professionals and friends is essential in those hard times.

Then you finish treatment. The bubble bursts. You're back at home, trying to build a new routine – and it's all up to you. Trying to put cancer behind you and move forward with your life is daunting. It can feel lonely and scary – you might not feel ready for it.

You might feel isolated, but you aren't on your own. Time will help to make life feel more normal and do-able. You don't have the safety net of your team and friends at hospital anymore and filling this gap is easier said than done, but there will always be people you can turn to.

Talking to people who've been through treatment is a good place to start. Look up the Team Young Lives group on Facebook – you can post how you feel, or start by reading other people's stories.

## Friendships on the outside

Most friends are bound to find it difficult to get what you've been through. They're probably just glad to have you back and are excited to be 'normal' with you again. They don't see that things have changed. You might feel a bit of pressure to be the old, fun you, but perhaps you don't feel like you're the same person as before your diagnosis.

Maybe you feel disconnected because you've missed out on stuff, and it seems like everyone else has moved on. Plus, it's not easy talking about it if you feel like everyone just wants you to 'get over it'.

Try sharing this factsheet – it can help friends see the complex issues people your age go through after finishing cancer treatment. They may never understand in the same way as someone who's been through it. But if you open up about how you feel – and what you need – a true mate will listen.

## Finding your identity again

Do you still feel like the same person you were before diagnosis? Cancer doesn't have to define you, but it might have changed you, or have made you see life differently.

Going through hard times can give you strength you didn't know you had. But once you're out of treatment, it's normal to feel a bit lost as you go from the role of 'patient' to 'survivor'. You might not identify with the label 'survivor' either, which is totally ok. It's easy for cancer to become a big part of your identity, especially if you're faced with the physical and emotional scars of treatment.

Take a step back. You need to find out what simply being you means now. You'll steadily find your feet as you get back into different aspects of your life. Remember all the other things that you are – a student, a colleague, a blogger, an athlete – you're so much more than just a survivor. You don't need to 'move on' from cancer, just don't give it more attention than it deserves.

## Changing plans

If you're feeling pressure to return to your job or course, what do you do? Your new perspective on life may not fit with what you were doing before. Or you might feel you've missed out on time where you could have been discovering what you want. Do you have a renewed passion and purpose, with a clear vision of your goals? Or are you dissatisfied with going back to things as they were?

Take the time to explore your options and think about what you would find fulfilling. Talk it through with the important people in your life. You could visit [nationalcareers.service.gov.uk](https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk) for inspiration.

## Getting back into work or education

Time away can make things tricky (like it needs to be any harder). You might have gaps on your CV or be expected to restart your course where you left off. Tiredness and other physical effects could rule out working full time, or force studying to take a back seat. This might all leave you feeling frustrated and that you can't move forward in the way you want.

First, know your rights. Not employing someone because of their illness or failing to make reasonable adjustments to help them study are forms of discrimination.

For advice and support, Access to Work ([gov.uk/access-to-work](https://gov.uk/access-to-work)) is a government programme that supports people with health conditions or disabilities to get back into work. Or speak to your place of education – their support service can offer advice, or UCAS has more guidance.

## The physical effects of treatment

Managing ongoing effects such as fatigue, disability or fertility issues can be a massive challenge, both physically and emotionally. Tell people about your needs and the barriers to you doing certain things. This can help make life a little easier – whether that's an employer making a reasonable adjustment to make work more doable, or a friend understanding you're too knackered to go out.

## Dealing with everything you've been through

After treatment, the emotional weight of what you've been through could start to hit home. It's normal to reflect on the enormity of it all, but it can be emotionally draining. Losing friends and 'survivor guilt' can be particularly difficult to get your head around. It's normal to feel this way, but you don't have to go through it alone. Get in touch with us when you're ready on the details below.

## Scanxiety and fear of relapse

Cancer doesn't just stop. You'll need follow-up appointments to check that your body is working as it should be. But this can bring it all back – the stress and anxiety, feeling constantly on standby.

Talk to your care team, who can help you find ways to manage the scanxiety and accommodate your needs wherever they can. Book appointments on a busy day if you like to have distractions, or a quiet day if you need time and space to mentally prepare. Having a friend or relative there to support you could make all the difference. And make sure you plan a treat afterwards!

### Contact us for support, Monday to Friday:

Phone: 0300 303 5220 (9am–5pm)

Email: [getsupport@younglivesvs cancer.org.uk](mailto:getsupport@younglivesvs cancer.org.uk) (9am–5pm)

Live chat at [younglivesvs cancer.org.uk](https://younglivesvs cancer.org.uk) (10am–4pm)



**Scan the QR code for more support  
with life after cancer treatment**

**Young Lives vs Cancer helps young people and their families find the strength to face everything cancer throws at them. We've been there before. We'll face it all, together.**