

YOUR FEELINGS WHEN YOU'VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER



Anger, numbness, shock, fear, guilt – whatever you're feeling right now is normal. There are two important things to know: it's not your fault and you're not alone.

Dealing with the diagnosis

One minute you're getting on with life and the next you have an illness that throws everything into question. There are people who can help you deal with the things that are most important to you. Right now, this could be how to talk to the people in your life, accessing benefits if you need to take time off work, support with pausing your studies – or simply dealing with your emotions.

Feeling alone

Lots of young people say that a diagnosis can make them feel isolated and alone, but there will be people who get exactly how you're feeling. Your care team (the group of professionals looking after you) is one, but there's also a community of young people connected by a cancer diagnosis. Ask your team about groups locally or online – they can offer some escapism and even a good laugh!

Feeling low

You may feel low or worried about the future and this is completely natural. If you need to cry, have a good cry: no-one can be strong all the time and that's ok. But if feeling low and tearful has become 'normal' and you aren't bouncing back, there's a chance you are depressed.

Time to reach out. Asking for help is a positive step. Opening up can be tough but it does help to talk about things rather than bottling them up. Start by speaking to someone you trust. This could be a friend, someone from your care team or an organisation (scan the QR code over the page for links).

If it all becomes too much. If you've got strong feelings of helplessness or you're feeling really overwhelmed, pick up the phone and talk to one of the organisations on our website now. You can just say you're struggling and would like someone to talk to. You could also ask your Young Lives vs Cancer social worker or your clinical nurse specialist for a referral to local counselling.

Tackling big questions

Young people tell us that having cancer can bring up some pretty intense questions that they feel no one can answer. Cancers that affect young people are very different to those affecting older adults, and most young people do get better. Treatments are improving all the time.

Everyone's situation is different so it's always best to talk about this with your consultant. They'll be able to talk you through the next steps and help to reassure you.

Anger

You might feel angry and frustrated after a diagnosis. It could feel unfair – why did it have to happen to you? What's even harder is that it's no-one's fault, so you don't know where to direct the anger.

While you don't have to feel guilty about being irritable, here are some approaches you could try:

- **Redirect it.** Find a way to release those emotions. Anything physical will help, whether it's punching a pillow, cranking up your music or going for a walk. If you're an inpatient you can ask to borrow an exercise bike.
- **Be mindful.** Mindfulness and breathing techniques are worth trying, so it feels more normal when you need to use them. Practise these with a friend or family member, so they can help you in the future.
- **Get professional help.** Anger becomes unhealthy when you start causing yourself or others harm. This could be through aggressive behaviour, turning to drink or drugs, or self-harm. That's when it's important to get professional help quickly – ask your care team for how to access support.

Fear

Being told you've got cancer can be really frightening and people will often think about the 'what ifs', even if it's all going well. This is normal. Uncertainty can be scary, but there are things you can do to ground yourself and feel more in control:

- **Speak to your care team at the hospital.** Knowing what to expect can be reassuring, and your team will always be happy to talk through things with you. No question is a silly question for you to ask.
- **Talk to others.** Fear can feel quite isolating – sharing with someone else what scares you can take away some of the fear's power over you. Your team will also have details of local free counselling for people with cancer, to help process your feelings.

Guilt

You might feel guilty because you've snapped at someone, or said something hurtful when you were stressed or scared. Try not to blame yourself – you're going through something tough. Talking openly to those around you can help, and remember to be kind on yourself too.

Resentment

Life may be pretty different at the moment and often you can't do all the things that make you happy. It can be so hard seeing your friends off living their lives and doing fun stuff when you're stuck in hospital or at home feeling exhausted.

- **Change what you can.** While you can't change the situation you're in, there are positive things you can do to feel more in control. Message a friend to catch up or make plans, see what activities you can do on the ward, and ask if there's free massage or aromatherapy at the hospital or a local cancer support centre. Try being honest with friends and tell them if you miss them – maybe you can all come up with some creative ways to stay in touch.
- **Get creative.** Journaling can be a great way to express difficult emotions without worrying about anyone judging you. Or you could try writing a blog, learning the ukulele, painting how you're feeling, or taking up a new hobby like knitting. What you make doesn't even need to be good (and it's often funnier if it isn't!). Sometimes just the process of doing something productive is a big help.

Contact us for support, Monday to Friday:

Phone: 0300 303 5220 (9am–5pm)

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

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



**Scan the QR code for more support
with understanding your feelings**

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.