

Regret about the past

This information is about coping with regret. Some people feel overwhelmed when they are told they have cancer. They may worry there are things they should or should not have done. This is normal. There is no right or wrong way to feel.

You may feel guilty or blame yourself for the cancer. You may want to find reasons why it happened to you. Most of the time, it is impossible to know exactly what causes a cancer. Over time, a combination of different risk factors may cause a cancer. Doctors do not fully understand all these factors yet.

Some people look back on their life and wish they had done things differently, such as spend more time with their families. You may have [different reactions and emotions](#) at different times. This is part of what many people go through when dealing with an illness. Try to focus on looking after yourself and getting the [help and support you need](#).

Tips for coping with regret about the past

- Ask your doctor or nurse any questions you have about the cancer. This may help to put your mind at rest.
- If you can, talk openly about your feelings with people you trust. Try to start a conversation and say how you feel. You may be surprised at how willing people are to listen and support you.
- Talking puts things into perspective. It can be a big relief to say your feelings out loud.
- Joining a self-help or support group can have many benefits. You may find it is easier to talk with people who are going through the same thing. You can be honest about your feelings about the cancer and how it affects you.
- Talking one-to-one with a trained counsellor can help you sort out your feelings. Your GP can give you details and make a referral.
- Think about what is important to you and focus on your relationships with family, friends or a partner. Or you may decide to do things you have always wanted to do.
- Doing something new can help distract and relax you. Some hobbies help you express your feelings, such as painting or playing music. You may also decide to be more active.
- Many people find making a positive change like eating well helps give them back a sense of control. It can also help you feel that you are doing the best for your health.
- [Mindfulness](#) is a way of becoming more aware of your thoughts and feelings. It uses techniques like meditation, breathing exercises and yoga to help you focus on what is happening at that time. It can help you change the way you think about things.

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:

- [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#)
- [Talking about cancer](#)
- [Your feelings after cancer treatment](#)
- [Your feelings and cancer – 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 NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite 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 phonecalls or videocalls with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Other useful contact details

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) – visit www.bacp.co.uk
- Help to Overcome Problems Effectively (HOPE) – a licensed programme developed by Coventry University and Macmillan Cancer Support to help people who have or have had cancer to get on with their lives – visit <https://learnzone.org.uk>
- Mind – visit www.mind.org.uk or call **0300 123 3393**
- UK Council for Psychotherapy – visit www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Notes and questions

