

A practical guide to living  
with and after cancer

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND CANCER TREATMENT

WE ARE  
MACMILLAN.  
CANCER SUPPORT

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

We are the nurses and therapists helping you through treatment. The experts on the end of the phone. The advisers telling you which benefits you're entitled to. The volunteers giving you a hand with the everyday things. The campaigners improving cancer care. The community there for you online, any time. The supporters who make it all possible.

Together, we are all Macmillan Cancer Support.

For cancer support every step of the way, call Macmillan on 0808 808 00 00 (Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm) or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

Hard of hearing? Use telephone 0808 808 0121, or Text Relay.  
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Braille and large print versions on request.

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# About this booklet

**Many people affected by cancer want to make positive changes to their lives. Taking steps to live a healthier lifestyle can be a big part of this.**

This booklet tells you about the benefits of being physically active and gives practical advice on getting started. Physical activity is any movement using your muscles that helps improve your fitness, health and well-being.

This booklet contains lots of contact details for other organisations that can help (see pages 46–52). There are also various websites where you can search for activities near you (pages 38–41). We've included quotes throughout from people affected by cancer. They have chosen to share their experience with us by becoming a Cancer Voice. To find out more, visit [macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices)

If you'd like to discuss this information, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm. If you're hard of hearing you can use textphone **0808 808 0121**, or Text Relay. For non-English speakers, interpreters are available. Alternatively, visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

If you find this booklet helpful, you could give it to your family and friends. They may also want information to help them support you.



You may find our resource *Move more: your complete guide to becoming active* helpful. It includes a guide on getting started, an activity diary and other resources. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/physicalactivity](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/physicalactivity) for more information.

# Why be more active?

When you are living with or after cancer, becoming more active can be a positive change to make in your life. We can all benefit from being physically active. It helps reduce the risk of health problems such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. There's also evidence that physical activity can benefit people affected by cancer.

At first, you might be nervous about building up your activity, especially if you haven't been active for a while. You may worry that you are too tired or don't know how to start. But even a little physical activity is better than none. It can help you feel less stressed and generally healthier. It can also help you feel more in control because you are doing something for yourself.

During treatment, doctors and nurses usually advise you to try to limit the time you spend sitting or lying down. They may encourage you to do some gentle activity such as short walks. If you are not active, you may feel more tired and lose muscle strength and cardiorespiratory fitness. Cardiorespiratory fitness is how well your heart and lungs deliver oxygen to muscles over longer periods of time. There is more information about how physical activity can help you during cancer treatment on pages 6–10.

After treatment, being physically active can help you cope with and recover from some side effects. There is more information about how physical activity can help you after cancer treatment on pages 12–15.

Being active can be doing simple daily activities such as housework, gardening and walking to the shops. Or it may be more energetic activities such as running, cycling, dancing or going to the gym.

How much and what you choose to do will depend on where you are with your treatment, your preferences and level of fitness.

Being active during and after treatment can:

- strengthen your muscles, joints and bones
- help look after your heart
- reduce anxiety and depression
- improve your mood and quality of life
- help you maintain a healthy weight.

During cancer treatment, you will know best how much activity you can manage. If you are concerned, ask your cancer doctor or specialist nurse about what's okay for you and your level of fitness. There is more information about being safe on pages 26–29.

**'When so many things are going wrong,  
it feels great to do something that you  
can tell makes you feel better as you do it.'**

**Ailsa**

## Being active during treatment

Being physically active during treatment is generally safe. But, there may be activities you'll need to avoid or be careful with. There's more information about this on pages 26–29. If you're still concerned, ask your cancer doctor or specialist nurse for advice.



'I didn't run during my treatment as I didn't feel I should. I tried it once and got light-headed so I walked instead. It got fresh air in my lungs and made me feel better.'

**Sharon**

What you can manage will depend on your level of fitness and the treatment you are having. You can be the judge of this. It might just be reducing the amount of time you spend sitting down. You could try doing some light housework, making yourself a snack or going for a walk with family or friends. Remember to pace yourself. Try not to do too much on a good day.

If you already exercise, you'll need to do so at a lower intensity during treatment. You can gradually increase it again after treatment.

'The feel good factor I got after exercise was fantastic. The focus of exercise during and after treatment has gone a long way to helping me get to where I am now both physically and mentally.'

**Michaela**

There is information in the next chapter about how physical activity can help with many treatment side effects.



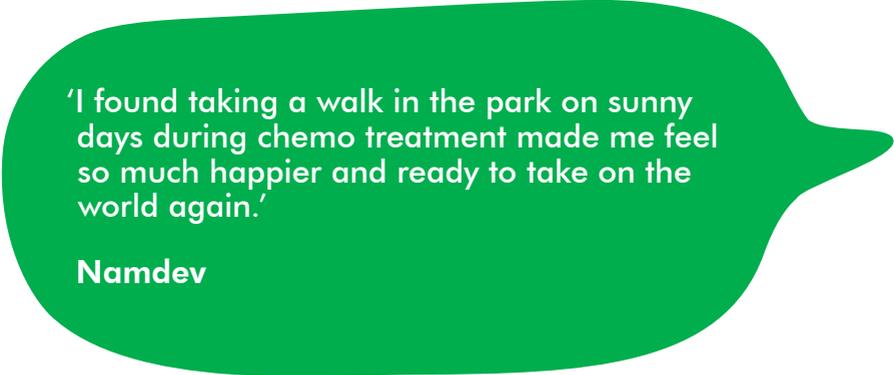
Studies of women with breast cancer have shown that exercise during chemotherapy helped them to stay fit or feel generally better about themselves.

# Reducing side effects

You may have side effects during your treatment and for some months after it finishes. Being more physically active may help reduce some of these.

## Reduce tiredness

Feeling as if you have no energy (fatigue) is a very common treatment side effect. It can sometimes last for months after treatment. Being more active can help you to manage fatigue. Even a small increase in activity can help to improve your energy levels.



'I found taking a walk in the park on sunny days during chemo treatment made me feel so much happier and ready to take on the world again.'

**Namdev**

For most people, taking short walks, preferably every day, is a good way to be active. Walk at a comfortable pace for you. Don't push yourself too hard. Doing too much, too soon, may make you more tired. Simple strength exercises such as 'sit to stand' (see page 20), yoga, Tai Chi and Qi Gong (see page 21) can also be helpful when your energy levels are low.

## Reduce stress and anxiety, and improve your mood

Stress, anxiety and low mood are common problems during and after treatment. Physical activity encourages the brain to produce chemicals (endorphins) that improve mood and reduce stress.

Being active with other people – by joining a group or going with friends or family – can really help. So can being active outdoors, in a green environment such as a park. You could try gardening or joining a walking group (see pages 39–40). Yoga is another activity that can relax you and reduce stress.

**'Following diagnosis, I became really depressed. Exercise was part of the cure – it really worked and still does.'**

**Aleksander**

## Sleep better

Being more active during the day helps you to relax and sleep better at night.

## Reduce constipation

A short walk each day can help with constipation. You should also drink plenty of fluids and have more fibre in your diet (unless your doctor advises against it).

## Build muscle strength

You may lose muscle bulk and strength during and after treatment. This happens when your muscles aren't being used as much as usual. It's also a side effect of hormone therapy for prostate cancer and steroids.

Strength training such as climbing stairs, moving from sitting to standing and resistance training using light weights will help increase your muscle strength. You can gradually build this up after treatment. See pages 20–21 for more information on strength training.

## Relieve joint pain and improve range of movement

If you have painful joints, regular physical activity can help ease pain by building muscle strength and improving flexibility. Joints that have a full range of movement are less likely to be sore. There is more information about flexibility exercises on page 21. If you have sore joints, swimming and cycling are good because they put little strain on the joints.

'Physical activity definitely aided my emotional well-being and helped me to remain positive. I used to come back from the doctor's and do a dance class with the children, and I would just forget about everything. It allowed me some time to not dwell on the negative.'

**Libby**



# Being active after treatment

Being physically active after treatment is a positive step in your recovery. It may help to reduce the risk of:

- late effects of treatment
- other health problems
- developing a new cancer
- certain cancers coming back.

## Late effects

These are side effects that may develop months or years after treatment.

### Heart health

Some treatments may slightly increase the risk of heart problems in the future. These include radiotherapy that's given close to the heart and certain chemotherapy or targeted therapy drugs. Aerobic activities (see page 19) may help to protect your heart and reduce the risk of late effects developing. Brisk walking, running, skipping, cycling, dancing and swimming are all aerobic activities.

### Bone health

Hormonal therapies for breast and prostate cancer, and early menopause due to cancer treatments, can increase the risk of bone thinning (osteoporosis). Weight-bearing exercises (activities where you are supporting your body weight) will help keep bones strong. They include walking, dancing or resistance training (see page 20).

If you have osteoporosis, get advice on exercise from your doctor, nurse, physiotherapist or exercise specialist. For more information on being safe if you have bone problems, see page 28.



Our booklet *Bone health* has more information about looking after your bones.

## Keeping to a healthy weight

It's not uncommon to gain weight during treatment. This may be because you're less active than usual. Hormonal therapy drugs and steroids, which are sometimes given with chemotherapy, can also cause weight gain.

Being active and eating healthily are major factors in controlling your weight. Keeping to a healthy weight can help reduce the risk of:

- joint problems
- other health problems (see next page)
- certain cancers coming back (see next page).
- developing a new (primary) cancer – the strongest evidence for this relates to breast, womb and bowel cancer.



We have a booklet called *Managing your weight after cancer treatment* that we can send you.

## Other health problems

After cancer treatment, some people are more at risk of developing other health problems. Being physically active and keeping to a healthy weight can help to reduce your risk of:

- high blood pressure
- stroke
- type 2 diabetes
- kidney disease
- depression or anxiety.

## Reducing the risk of cancer coming back

There is some emerging evidence that being active at the levels recommended (see page 18) and keeping to a healthy weight can reduce the risk of certain cancers coming back or progressing.

A review showed that women with breast cancer who walked at an average pace for 3–5 hours a week after treatment had a reduced risk of the cancer coming back. Studies have also shown that walking at an average pace for 3–6 hours a week reduced the risk of bowel cancer coming back. Another study showed that walking briskly for at least 3 hours a week may reduce the risk of early prostate cancer progressing.

Research in this area is still new and limited to certain cancers. We need more evidence before we can say exactly how much exercise is needed to get the benefits, and exactly how it may protect against a recurrence of cancer. But so far, the signs are that with certain cancers, being active can make a difference.

## Guidelines

The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) produces guidelines that are supported by the National Cancer Institute. Its advice is:

- Avoid being inactive.
- Physical activity is safe during and after cancer treatment.
- Get back to your normal activities as soon as possible after treatment.
- Build up to the recommended physical activity levels gradually (see page 18).

# Advanced cancer and physical activity

If you are living with advanced cancer, being physically active has benefits. It can help improve symptoms such as tiredness, poor appetite and constipation. It can also reduce stress and help you sleep better.

Start slowly and increase the amount you do gradually. To begin with, try to reduce the amount of time you spend sitting or lying down. Just moving around the house and doing simple day-to-day things will help.

You may be able to manage short walks or gentle stretching exercises. You could get your family and friends to join you.

Resistance exercises can help strengthen your muscles and bones. This helps with getting in and out of chairs or baths, going up and down stairs, and going shopping. It also helps reduce the risk of accidentally falling. There are chair-based exercises that can help improve your muscle strength and flexibility. To see how to do these, visit [nhs.uk/tools/pages/exercises-for-older-people.aspx](https://www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/exercises-for-older-people.aspx). Some classes focus specifically on chair exercises. Ask your GP or nurse if there are any in your local area.

There is more information about resistance training and stretching exercises on pages 20–21.

You may need to avoid some types of physical activity if, for example, the cancer is in your bones or you have bone thinning (see page 28). Ask your doctor or palliative care team for advice before you start.



# How much activity is recommended?

This chapter looks at current UK recommendations on physical activity and the activities that can help you achieve these. How much you can do will depend on different factors – see pages 24–25.

In the UK, adults are advised to do at least two and a half hours (150 minutes) of moderate-intensity physical activity a week. The levels of intensity are explained on page 20. This could be 30 minutes of activity on five days of the week, which could be broken up into 10 minutes of activity three times a day. It's important to gradually build up to this amount at a pace that's comfortable for you. There are ideas for aerobic exercises on the next page.

It's also important to do activities that improve muscle strength on at least two days of the week. If you are older or at risk of falling, you are also advised to do activities that improve coordination and balance on at least two days of the week. There is more information about strength exercises and about balance and flexibility on pages 20–21.

You can find out more about types of activity and the recommendations for people of different ages from the Department of Health ([dh.gov.uk](https://www.dh.gov.uk)) and the World Health Organization ([who.int](https://www.who.int)).

## What types of activity should I do?

There is no single activity that is best for everyone. Choose activities you enjoy and that fit in with your life. If possible, do a mix of activities that improve your aerobic fitness, strength and flexibility.

### Aerobic exercise

Aerobic exercise uses large muscle groups repetitively for a period of time. It raises your heart rate, so your heart works harder to pump blood through the body. It's particularly good for your heart health. Common aerobic exercises include:

- **Walking** – This is one of the simplest and most effective aerobic exercises. It is also a weight-bearing exercise because your feet and legs support your body's weight. This means it's good for strengthening your bones (spine, pelvis and leg bones). All you need are comfortable walking shoes.
- **Running and jogging** – These are also weight-bearing exercises, but you should choose something gentler if you have bone or joint problems. These activities are high-impact and may put stress on your spine and joints.
- **Cycling and swimming** – These are good for your heart and lungs. They strengthen your muscles and put very little strain on your joints. They can be good activities if you have bone or joint pain.

## Exercise intensity

If you haven't been active for a long time, increase your activity gradually. Try to do a little more in time and distance each week. When you're comfortable doing an activity for longer, you can think about increasing your speed.

This is how it feels to be active at different intensities:

**Light intensity** – You are breathing and talking easily and it doesn't feel like there's a lot of effort involved.

**Moderate intensity** – Your breathing is quicker and deeper but you are able to talk. Your body warms up, your face has a healthy glow and your heart is beating faster than normal but not racing.

**Vigorous or high intensity** – You are breathing very hard so that you can't carry on a conversation and your heartbeat feels fast.

## Resistance/strength exercises

This involves making your muscles work harder than usual against some form of resistance. It strengthens muscles, bones and joints and improves your balance. It's a good activity if you have, or are at risk of, bone problems. Having muscle strength makes you more able to do day-to-day things for yourself, so it can help you be more independent.

The exercises can be done with hand weights, machines or elastic bands. You can do simple exercises at home, such as lifting cans of food or bottles of water.

Other simple strength exercises you can do at home, using a chair, are 'sit to stand' or 'calf raises'. The NHS Choices website shows you how to do these and other simple exercises safely at home. Visit [nhs.uk/tools/pages/exercises-for-older-people.aspx](https://www.nhs.uk/tools/pages/exercises-for-older-people.aspx)

If you're doing a gym-based programme with heavy weights, make sure you get instruction from a qualified exercise specialist.

### **Flexibility exercises**

Having flexible joints helps you to stay supple and prevent injuries and strains. Simple stretching exercises are a good way to start, especially if you have been unwell. Use the NHS Choices website (link on previous page) for some stretches you can do.

Yoga, Tai Chi and Qi Gong are also good for flexibility. They use breathing techniques combined with body movements. They can also help relax you and reduce stress.

### **Balance exercises**

Yoga, Tai Chi, pilates and Qi Gong help increase balance and strength. Cycling and dancing are also good for your balance.

Later Life Training (see page 46) can send you booklets about simple strength and balance exercises you can do at home. These are good for building strength, whatever your age is.

The table on the next page lists different activities and how they can help improve your stamina, strength, flexibility and balance. It has been amended from the booklet *Be active for life* (British Heart Foundation, 2011).

'Obviously I had to rest after treatment, and I couldn't do things like abdominal work, but I just built up my movement slowly. It took about three months after my treatment to get back to the level fitness I had before.'

**Libby**

Activity	Aerobic/ stamina	Strength	Flexibility	Balance
<b>Aerobic classes at a gym</b>	x	x		
<b>Badminton</b>	x		x	x
<b>Brisk walking/ walking uphill</b>	x	x		
<b>Canoeing/ dragon boating (see IBCPC on page 46)</b>	x	x	x	
<b>Climbing stairs</b>	x	x		x
<b>Cycling</b>	x	x		x
<b>Dancing</b>	x		x	x
<b>DIY</b>		x	x	x
<b>Football</b>	x	x		x
<b>Mowing the lawn</b>	x	x	x	
<b>Pilates/Tai Chi/ yoga/Qi Gong</b>		x	x	x
<b>Vacuuming</b>	x		x	
<b>Washing the car</b>	x	x	x	
<b>Water aerobics</b>	x	x		x



# How much activity is right for you?

What and how much you do will depend on:

- How fit you were before you were diagnosed – if you were active before, you may be able to continue with the same activities when you feel able.
- The type of cancer and treatments you had or are still having – there may be some activities you'll need to be careful with (see next chapter).
- Any treatment side effects or symptoms you have.
- Your age and any long-term conditions you have, such as heart problems.
- Whether you have bone loss (see page 28) as a result of the cancer or its treatment.

'To get to the top of your stairs can be a huge challenge if you're undergoing chemotherapy. But if you can do that, then maybe you can do it twice the next day.'

**Michelle**

During treatment, your energy levels will vary from day to day. The main aim should be to spend less time sitting or lying down.

You will be the best judge of which activities you want to do and are able to do. Set yourself realistic goals. If you feel very tired the day after activity, you may be trying to do too much, too soon. Over time, you'll be able to increase the amount you do.

After treatment, increase your activity slowly. As a general rule, and only if you are able to, try to gradually increase it to 2.5–3 hours of moderate- to vigorous-intensity exercise a week. Exercise intensity is explained on page 20.

# Being safe

Being physically active has fewer risks than being inactive. But, it's important to know how to take care of yourself when you begin to be more active. Make sure you read the general advice on page 29.

Which activities are best for you can depend on the type of cancer you have, your treatments and any other conditions you have. If you are in any doubt, get advice from your doctor.

## Treatments

### Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy lowers the number of blood cells in your blood. If your white blood cells are low, you are more at risk of getting an infection. Your cancer doctor might advise you to avoid public places such as swimming pools or gyms until your white blood cells are back to a normal level.



We can send you more information about avoiding infection when you have reduced immunity. There is also a slideshow about things you can do to avoid infection at [maccmillan.org.uk/avoidinginfection](https://www.maccmillan.org.uk/avoidinginfection)

If you have a central or PICC line, avoid swimming because of the risk of infection. You should also avoid vigorous upper body exercises, which could displace your line.

Platelets are cells that help the blood to clot. If your platelets are low, you are more at risk of bruising or bleeding. Your doctor may advise that you take gentle exercise until your platelets recover.

If your red blood cells are very low (anaemia), you will feel very tired and sometimes breathless. Your doctor might ask you to only do day-to-day activities until the anaemia improves.

### **Radiotherapy**

If you have a skin reaction or redness due to radiotherapy, avoid swimming as the chemicals in the water can irritate your skin. After treatment, when any redness or skin reaction has gone, it's fine to swim again.

### **Surgery**

It's important to start moving around as soon as possible after surgery. This reduces the risk of complications such as blood clots and helps with recovery. Depending on the operation, your surgeon will tell you which activities you should avoid and for how long.

A physiotherapist or nurse may show you exercises to do when you get home. For example, women who have breast surgery need to do arm and shoulder exercises to improve their flexibility. If you had surgery to your pelvis, you may be shown exercises to help strengthen your pelvic floor muscles. Try to do these for as long as you were advised to. If you have pain or discomfort that stops you doing them, tell the physiotherapist or nurse.

## Other safety issues

Some treatment side effects or other medical conditions can affect which physical activities are right for you.

### **Bone problems**

If you have bone thinning or cancer in the bones, avoid high-impact activities. With these, there is more risk of you falling and breaking (fracturing) a bone. High-impact activities are things that involve pounding actions (for example, feet hitting the floor or hitting a ball with a racket). They include running, jogging, football, tennis, squash and hockey. You should also avoid exercises where you bend forward at the waist, such as toe-touching and sit-ups.

Good activities include walking, dancing, climbing stairs, swimming and resistance exercises. It's also a good idea to do some exercises that improve your coordination and balance, to reduce your risk of falling. These include dancing, exercising to music and Tai Chi.

### **Peripheral neuropathy (nerve damage)**

Some chemotherapy drugs can damage the nerves. This causes numbness or tingling in your hands or feet, muscle weakness or difficulty with balance and coordination. If your feet or balance are affected, then running or brisk walking (especially on uneven surfaces) may not be the best activity for you. Cycling or swimming may be more suitable. Remember to check your feet regularly for cuts or blisters.

### **Lymphoedema**

If you have lymphoedema, always wear a compression garment when you exercise. Avoid doing lots of repetitive action with the affected limb. Swimming can be helpful if you have lymphoedema as it gently massages the lymphatic vessels. Ask your lymphoedema

specialist for advice. Build up the physical activity involving that arm or leg slowly. We have a booklet about lymphoedema, which we can send you.

### **Heart or lung problems**

Most people with heart or lung problems can benefit from regular physical activity. Check with your doctor or specialist before you start any exercise programme.

### **Medicines to thin the blood**

If you're taking medicine to thin the blood, you will bruise more easily. Avoid high-impact activities (see previous page), as you could get knocked or fall over.

## **General advice**

- Stop if you experience any sudden symptoms, including feeling dizzy, chest pain, a racing heart, breathing problems, feeling sick, unusual back or bone pain, muscle weakness or a persistent headache. Contact your doctor if you notice any of these, or any other symptoms.
- Don't exercise if you feel unwell, have an infection or high temperature, or have any symptoms that worry you.
- Wear well-fitting trainers – don't risk an injury by wearing the wrong shoes.
- Drink plenty of water so you don't get dehydrated.
- Have a healthy snack such as a banana after exercising.
- Avoid uneven surfaces and activities that increase the risk of falling or hurting yourself, especially if you have bone problems.

# Who can help?

It's important to get advice before you start becoming more active. The following people and organisations can help you.

## A physiotherapist

Your GP or cancer specialist can usually arrange a physiotherapist for you if you need one. You may be able to go directly to a physiotherapist yourself, known as self-referral. A physiotherapist, or a qualified cancer exercise specialist if you have one, can help you:

- increase your physical fitness
- improve your energy, strength, flexibility, coordination and balance
- manage the side effects or after-effects of treatment
- enjoy and increase your physical activity and avoid injuries.

You can ask them questions, such as:

- 'I've never exercised before – how should I start?'
- 'I was very active before my diagnosis – will I be able to get back to the same level?'
- 'How can I improve my shortness of breath and feel less tired?'
- 'How can I improve my balance?'
- 'Can I improve the strength of my hands, arms or legs?'

- ‘How can I manage fatigue and balance work and home life?’
- ‘Which exercises can help me get up the stairs?’

If you have more specific needs, they can arrange a rehabilitation programme for you.

## Your doctor

You can talk to your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or GP before you start exercising. They can give you advice on what physical activities could be good for you. Some GPs, cancer treatment centres or support groups have exercise referral schemes – see below. These help people become healthier and more active after illnesses such as cancer. There may be an exercise programme that’s part of some research at your cancer treatment centre. Ask your cancer doctor or nurse for more information.

## Exercise referral schemes

Many people find that exercising in a group keeps them more motivated. If you think this might help, you may want to join an exercise referral scheme. They are held at local community centres, healthy living centres and leisure centres. Ask your GP or hospital doctor about any in your area. Not all areas have an exercise referral scheme, or it may be restricted to certain medical conditions.

Specially trained exercise professionals manage these schemes. But it’s a good idea to check whether they have been trained to work with people who have or had cancer.

When making a referral, your doctor will share some information about your health with the exercise professional. This is kept confidential.

Your trainer will explain the benefits and risks of increasing your physical activity. You'll be asked to give your consent, which means you agree to the exercise plan and understand the benefits and risks.

They will advise you on whether it's best to exercise in a group or on your own. Your trainer will match the activities to your individual needs.

Some areas also have schemes in care homes, hospices and day centres. They often include activities such as walking, dancing, pilates, aerobics, Tai Chi or yoga.

## **An occupational therapist**

Your GP or cancer specialist may refer you to an occupational therapist. They can teach you how to manage tiredness and suggest changes to your home, which will make it safer and help you be more independent. Doing simple things for yourself in the home is a way of increasing your physical activity. If things are easier at home, you will also have more time and energy to do activities such as walking or gardening.

# Getting started

When you're ready to become more active, we have a guide called *Getting started*. It's in our *Move more* pack, which also contains an activity diary and other helpful resources. We also have an exercise DVD called *Get active, feel good*. It demonstrates home-based exercise sessions including aerobic, strength and flexibility exercises, at a variety of levels of intensity.



To order our *Move more* pack or the *Get active, feel good* DVD, visit [be.macmillan.org.uk](http://be.macmillan.org.uk)

Start by doing something you enjoy and that fits in with your life. This could be a brisk walk with friends, playing with your children or grandchildren in the park, gardening or walking to the shops.

Here are some more ideas:

- Join a walking group – see page 39.
- Walk or cycle to the shops, to see friends or to work.
- Try swimming, cycling, dancing or gardening.
- Play a sport such as badminton, table tennis or bowls.
- Try stretching exercises such as yoga, Tai Chi or pilates.
- Ask your GP to refer you to a structured exercise referral scheme or a physiotherapist.



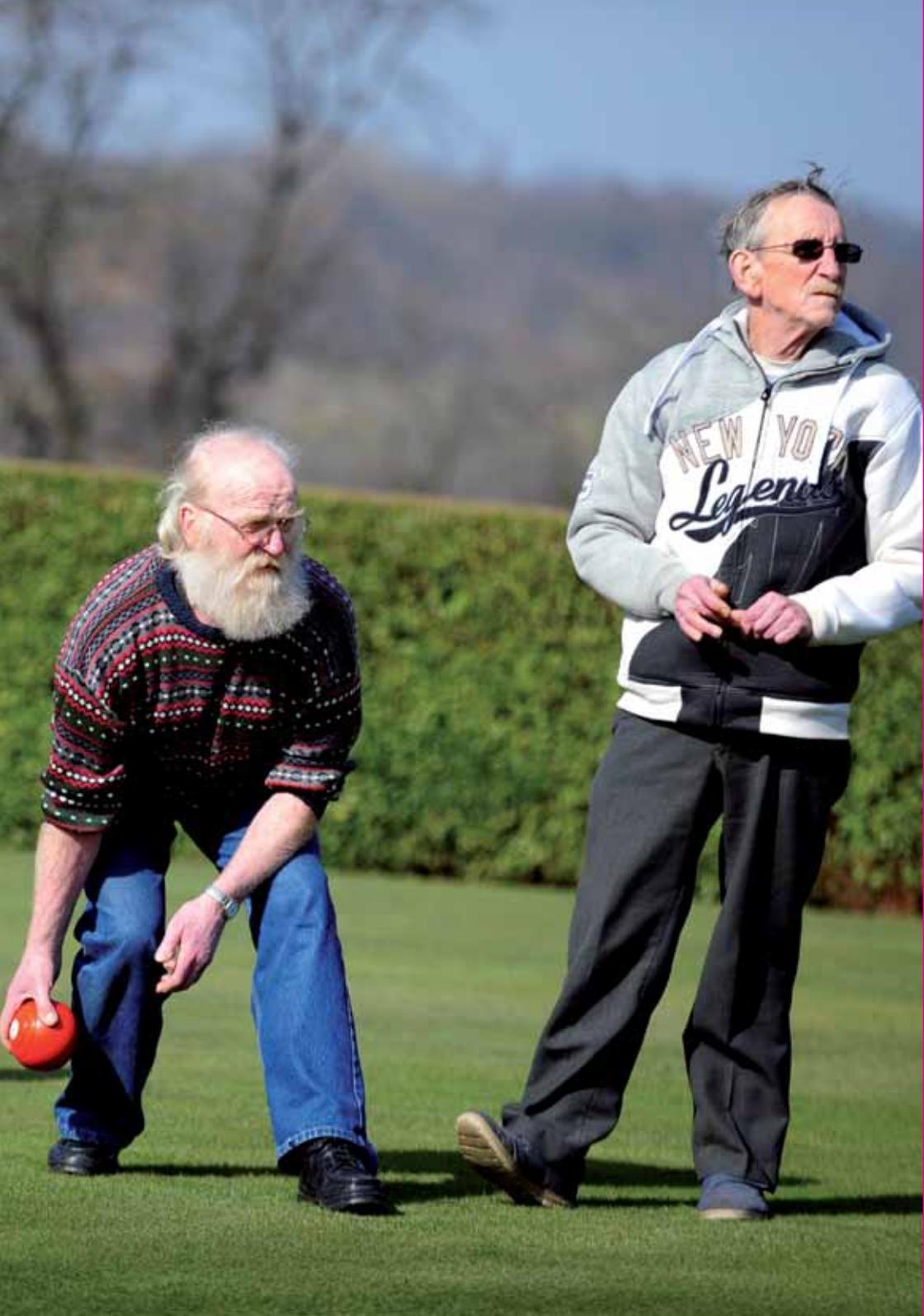
**'I have found that  
in order to make  
sure I do exercise,  
I have to plan it in  
advance, otherwise  
it won't happen.'**

**Beverly**

It's not always easy to become active for the first time, or to return to activity during or after cancer. Having clear goals, staying motivated and having support can all be very helpful. Our *Getting started* booklet can help you achieve this.

Here are some things that other people have found helpful:

- Remind yourself of the benefits and the reasons why you're doing this.
- Set goals you can achieve at your own pace, whether that's getting up from the sofa regularly, going for a walk or taking part in an exercise class.
- Gradually increase the amount you do. If you have a setback, return to an easier stage of your exercise plan.
- Keep a record of how active you've been and how you feel, so you can see your progress. There's an activity diary in our *Move more* pack.
- Share your plans with other people who are supportive.
- Try being active with other people such as family or friends, or join a group or club.
- Make sure the activities are fun and enjoyable – some people find it's helpful to do a variety of activities.
- Don't become disheartened if you don't achieve a planned goal – think about why you weren't able to achieve it and plan a new one. Sometimes, it can take longer to develop fitness after treatment, so you may need to change your expected dates for completing goals.



# What activities are available near you?

There are lots of ways you can find out about activities in your area:

- Contact your local council. Look on their website or call them to find out what activities are provided in parks and leisure centres.
- Ask your GP if they can refer you to any specialist service, such as an exercise referral scheme, falls prevention (if you're worried about falling) or physiotherapy (if you've had surgery, for example).
- Search online – there's a list of useful search tools on the next page.
- Contact the national governing body of an activity to find clubs near you. For example, if you're interested in outdoor bowls, you could contact Bowls England, Bowls Scotland, Welsh Bowling Association or Northern Ireland Bowling Association. Your country's national sports council can tell you about individual sports' governing bodies – see page 40.
- Get advice from health professionals – see pages 30–32.

## Next steps

Once you've started, you'll probably find being active becomes an enjoyable part of the way you live. Many people notice the benefits quite quickly. You'll feel less tired and stressed, and have more confidence. Noticing these changes and knowing the benefits to your health can keep you motivated, even on days when it's difficult. If you're struggling, don't be hard on yourself. Just remind yourself of all the benefits.

There are some online search tools that you may find helpful:

- On the Spogo website you can search for sport and fitness venues, clubs and activities across the UK. You can search by activity or location. Visit [spogo.co.uk](https://www.spogo.co.uk)
- England has a national search tool on the NHS Choices website. Go to [nhs.uk/livewell/fitness/pages/whybeactive.aspx](https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/fitness/pages/whybeactive.aspx) and enter your postcode.
- Scotland has a national search tool at [activescotland.org.uk](https://www.activescotland.org.uk). Enter your postcode or town to find activities near you.
- Wales has a website where you can search for activities near you – visit [sportwales.org.uk](https://www.sportwales.org.uk)
- In Northern Ireland, you can use the website [activeplacesni.net](https://www.activeplacesni.net) to search for activities near you.

## Walking groups

Walking groups are an enjoyable, social way to become active. There are free, guided health walks across the UK. You can search for a walk near you using the details below.

- **Let's Walk Cymru (Wales)**  
[www.ramblers.org.uk/letswalkcymru](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/letswalkcymru)  
029 2064 6890
- **Paths for All (Scotland)**  
[www.pathsforall.org.uk](http://www.pathsforall.org.uk)  
0125 921 8888
- **Ramblers**  
[www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)  
020 7339 8500 (England)  
0157 786 1222 (Scotland)  
029 2064 4308 (Wales)
- **Walk NI (Northern Ireland)**  
[www.walkni.com](http://www.walkni.com)  
028 9030 3930
- **Walking for Health (England)**  
[www.walkingforhealth.org.uk](http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk)  
020 7339 8541

'I found the Walking for Health leaflet in my library. It was one of the best things I've ever done, I feel like I've found the real me again. I am fitter, happier and more confident.'

**Jermaine**

## Sports

National sports councils will be able to give you contact details for individual sports' governing bodies. They can help you find facilities near you. These are the UK's sports councils:

- **Sport England**  
www.sportengland.org  
020 7273 1551
- **Sport Scotland**  
www.sportscotland.org.uk  
0141 534 6500
- **Sport Wales**  
www.sportwales.org.uk  
0845 045 0904
- **Sport Northern Ireland**  
www.sportni.net  
028 9088 1222

## Gardening

Gardening is a way of enjoying some physical activity outdoors. It can also be quite therapeutic to watch your garden grow. The National Gardens Scheme gives you the chance to visit some of the most beautiful gardens in England and Wales. The scheme raises money for several charities including Macmillan and other cancer and carers charities. Visit [ngs.org.uk](http://ngs.org.uk) to find a garden near you, or to open your own garden to raise money for charity.



We have a leaflet, *Gardening as a way to keep active*, which we can send you for free.

## Mobility and disability organisations

There are specific organisations that can help if you have mobility problems or a disability:

- **Disability Sport Wales**  
[www.disabilitysportwales.org](http://www.disabilitysportwales.org)
- **Disability Sports Northern Ireland**  
[www.dsni.co.uk](http://www.dsni.co.uk)
- **English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS)**  
[www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk)
- **Scottish Disability Sport**  
[www.scottishdisabilitysport.com](http://www.scottishdisabilitysport.com)
- **WheelPower**  
[www.wheelpower.org.uk](http://www.wheelpower.org.uk)

We have listed more organisations on pages 46–47 that can help you with physical activity.

# How we can help you

**Cancer is the toughest fight most of us will ever face. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.**

## Get in touch

### Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment,  
London SE1 7UQ

### Questions about cancer?

Call free on **0808 808 00 00**

(Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm)

**[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)**

### Hard of hearing?

Use textphone 0808 808 0121  
or Text Relay.

### Non-English speaker?

Interpreters are available.

## Clear, reliable information about cancer

We can help you by phone, email, via our website and publications or in person. And our information is free to everyone affected by cancer.

## Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm. Our cancer support specialists provide clinical, financial, emotional and practical information and support to anyone affected by cancer. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **[macmillan.org.uk/talktous](http://macmillan.org.uk/talktous)**

## Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres, and offer you the opportunity to speak with someone face-to-face. Find your nearest one at **[macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](http://macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres)**

## Publications

We provide expert, up-to-date information about different types of cancer, tests and treatments, and information about living with and after cancer. We can send you free booklets, leaflets, and fact sheets.

## Other formats

We have a small range of information in other languages and formats. Our translations are for people who don't speak English and our Easy Read booklets are useful for anyone who can't read our information. We also produce a range of audiobooks. Find out more at [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats)

Please email us at [cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk) if you'd like us to produce our information for you in Braille or large print.

You can find all of our information, along with several videos, online at [macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation)

## Review our information

Help us make our resources even better for people affected by cancer. Being one of our reviewers gives you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, fact sheets, leaflets, videos, illustrations and website text.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email [reviewing@macmillan.org.uk](mailto:reviewing@macmillan.org.uk)

## Need out-of-hours support?

You can find a lot of information on our website, [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

For medical attention out of hours, please contact your GP for their out-of-hours service.

## Someone to talk to

When you or someone you know has cancer, it can be difficult to talk about how you're feeling. You can call our cancer support specialists to talk about how you feel and what's worrying you.

We can also help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face-to-face with people who understand what you're going through.

## Professional help

Our Macmillan nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals offer expert treatment and care. They help individuals and families deal with cancer from diagnosis onwards, until they no longer need this help.

You can ask your GP, hospital consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals available in your area, or call us.

## Support for each other

No one knows more about the impact cancer has on a person's life than those who have been affected by it themselves. That's why we help to bring people with cancer and carers together in their communities and online.

### Support groups

You can find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)

### Online community

You can also share your experiences, ask questions, get and give support to others in our online community at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)

## Financial and work-related support

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. Some people may have to stop working.

If you've been affected in this way, we can help. Call the Macmillan Support Line and one of our cancer support specialists will tell you about the benefits and other financial help you may be entitled to.

We can also give you information about your rights at work as an employee and help you find further support.

### Macmillan Grants

Money worries are the last thing you need when you have cancer. A Macmillan Grant is a one-off payment for people with cancer, to cover a variety of practical needs including heating bills, extra clothing, or a much needed break.

Find out more about the financial and work-related support we can offer at [macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport)

## Learning about cancer

You may find it useful to learn more about cancer and how to manage the impact it can have on your life.

You can do this online on our Learn Zone – [macmillan.org.uk/learnzone](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/learnzone) – which offers a variety of e-learning courses and workshops. There's also a section dedicated to supporting people with cancer – ideal for people who want to learn more about what their relative or friend is going through.

## Other useful organisations

### Organisations that can help with physical activity

#### **Cancer Rehabilitation**

**Email** [info@canrehab.co.uk](mailto:info@canrehab.co.uk)

**[www.canrehab.co.uk](http://www.canrehab.co.uk)**

Runs training workshops for health and fitness professionals on developing and providing safe and effective exercise-based cancer rehabilitation programmes.

#### **Cyclists Fighting Cancer**

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 8 Wood Street,  
Stratford-upon-Avon  
CV37 6JE

**Tel** 03452 579840

**Email** [info@cyclistsfc.org.uk](mailto:info@cyclistsfc.org.uk)

**[www.cyclistsfc.org.uk](http://www.cyclistsfc.org.uk)**

Provides bikes, adapted tricycles and equipment to children and young people whose lives have been affected by cancer.

#### **International Breast Cancer Paddlers' Commission (IBCPC)**

**Email** [committee@ibcpc.com](mailto:committee@ibcpc.com)

**[www.ibcpc.com](http://www.ibcpc.com)**

Can give details of UK dragon boating groups. There is an international movement encouraging breast cancer survivors to improve their physical health and social well-being through dragon boating.

#### **Later Life Training**

Silver Cottage, Main Street,  
Killin FK21 8UT

**Tel** 01838 300 310

**Email**

[info@laterlifetraining.co.uk](mailto:info@laterlifetraining.co.uk)

**[www.laterlifetraining.co.uk](http://www.laterlifetraining.co.uk)**

Has useful leaflets about simple exercises you can do at home, which can improve your strength and balance whatever your age.

## **National Osteoporosis Society**

Camerton,  
Bath BA2 0PJ

**Tel** 0845 450 0230  
(Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm)

**Email** [nurses@nos.org.uk](mailto:nurses@nos.org.uk)

**[www.nos.org.uk](http://www.nos.org.uk)**

UK charity dedicated to improving the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of osteoporosis.

## **General cancer support organisations**

### **Cancer Black Care**

79 Acton Lane,  
London NW10 8UT

**Tel** 020 8961 4151

**Email**

[info@cancerblackcare.org.uk](mailto:info@cancerblackcare.org.uk)

**[www.cancerblackcare.org.uk](http://www.cancerblackcare.org.uk)**

Offers information and support for people with cancer from ethnic communities, their friends, carers and families.

### **Cancer Focus Northern Ireland**

40–44 Eglantine Avenue,  
Belfast BT9 6DX

**Tel** 0800 783 3339  
(Mon–Fri, 9am–1pm)

**Email** [hello@cancerfocusni.org](mailto:hello@cancerfocusni.org)

**[www.cancerfocusni.org](http://www.cancerfocusni.org)**

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer, including a free helpline, counselling and links to local support groups.

### **Cancer Support Scotland**

Calman Cancer Support  
Centre, 75 Shelley Road,  
Glasgow G12 0ZE

**Tel** 0800 652 4531

**Email** [info@](mailto:info@cancersupportscotland.org)

[cancersupportscotland.org](http://cancersupportscotland.org)

**[www.cancersupportscotland.org](http://www.cancersupportscotland.org)**

Runs cancer support groups throughout Scotland. Also offers free complementary therapies and counselling to anyone affected by cancer.

### **Irish Cancer Society**

43–45 Northumberland Road,  
Dublin 4

**Tel** 1800 200 700

(Mon–Thu, 9am–7pm,  
Fri, 9am–5pm)

**Email** [helpline@irishcancer.ie](mailto:helpline@irishcancer.ie)

**www.cancer.ie**

National cancer charity offering information, support and care to people affected by cancer. Has a helpline staffed by specialist cancer nurses. You can also chat to a nurse online and use the site's message board.

### **Maggie's Centres**

**Tel** 0300 123 1801

**Email** [enquiries@maggiescentres.org](mailto:enquiries@maggiescentres.org)

**www.maggiescentres.org**

Provide information about cancer, benefits advice, and emotional or psychological support. Find details for your local centre on the website.

### **Penny Brohn Cancer Care**

Chapel Pill Lane,  
Pill, Bristol BS20 0HH

**Tel** 0845 123 2310

(Mon–Fri, 9.30am–5pm)

**Email**

[helpline@pennybrohn.org](mailto:helpline@pennybrohn.org)

**www.pennybrohn  
cancercare.org**

Offers a combination of physical, emotional and spiritual support, using complementary therapies and self-help techniques.

### **Tenovus**

Head Office,  
Gleider House, Ty Glas Road,  
Cardiff CF14 5BD

**Tel** 0808 808 1010

(Mon–Sun, 8am–8pm)

**www.tenovus.org.uk**

Aims to help everyone get equal access to cancer treatment and support. Funds research and provides mobile cancer support units, a free helpline, an 'Ask the nurse' service on the website and benefits advice.



You can search for more organisations on our website at [macmillan.org.uk/organisations](http://macmillan.org.uk/organisations), or call us on 0808 808 00 00.

# Further resources

## Related Macmillan information

You may want to order some of our other resources. These include:

- *Bone health*
- *Coping with fatigue*
- *Gardening as a way to keep active*
- *Get active, feel good DVD*
- *Healthy eating and cancer*
- *How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer*
- *Life after cancer treatment*
- *Managing your weight after cancer treatment*
- *Move more: your complete guide to becoming active*
- *Understanding lymphoedema*
- *Walk this way – Walking for Health leaflet*

To order, visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call **0808 808 00 00**. All of our information is also available online at **macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation**

Some of our information is available in other formats and languages. Visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** to find out more.

## Macmillan audiobooks

Our high-quality audiobooks, based on our variety of booklets, include information about cancer types, different treatments and about living with cancer.

To order your free CD, visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call **0808 808 00 00**.

## Macmillan videos

There are many videos on the Macmillan website featuring real-life stories and information from professionals. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/physicalactivity](http://macmillan.org.uk/physicalactivity) for personal stories about physical activity during and after cancer.

## Useful websites

There is a lot of information about cancer online. Some websites are excellent; others have out-of-date or misleading information. The sites listed here are considered by nurses and doctors to have accurate and up-to-date information.

### Macmillan Cancer Support [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Find out more about living with the practical, emotional and financial effects of cancer. Our website contains expert information about cancer and its treatments, including:

- all the information from our 150+ booklets and 360+ fact sheets

- videos featuring real-life stories from people affected by cancer and information from professionals
- how Macmillan can help, the services we offer and where to get support
- how to contact our cancer support specialists, including an email form for sending your questions
- local support groups search, links to other cancer organisations and a directory of information materials
- a huge online community of people affected by cancer sharing their experiences, advice and support.

### American Cancer Society [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

Health organisation dedicated to improving cancer prevention and treatment. The website contains lots of information about cancer.

**Cancer Research UK**  
**[www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)**

Contains patient information on all types of cancer and has a clinical trials database.

**Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland**  
**[www.hscni.net](http://www.hscni.net)**

Provides information about health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

**Healthtalkonline**  
**[www.healthtalkonline.org](http://www.healthtalkonline.org)**  
**[www.youthhealthtalk.org](http://www.youthhealthtalk.org)**  
**(site for young people)**

Contains information about some cancers and has video and audio clips of people talking about their experiences of cancer and its treatments.

**Macmillan Cancer Voices**  
**[www.macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancervoices)**

A UK-wide network that enables people who have or have had cancer, and those close to them such as family and carers, to speak out about their experience of cancer.

**National Cancer Institute – National Institute of Health – USA****[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)**

Gives information on cancer and treatments.

**NHS Choices**  
**[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)**

The UK's biggest health information website. Also has service information for England.

**NHS Direct Wales**  
**[www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)**

NHS health information site for Wales.

**NHS Inform**  
**[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)**

NHS health information site for Scotland.

## **Patient UK**

**[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)**

Provides people in the UK with good-quality information about health and disease.

Includes evidence-based information leaflets on a wide variety of medical and health topics. Also reviews and links to many health and illness-related websites.

## **Riprap**

**[www.riprap.org.uk](http://www.riprap.org.uk)**

Developed especially for teenagers who have a parent with cancer.



## Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. Some photographs are of models.

## Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by our senior reviewer, Dr Anna Campbell, University of Dundee & CanRehab, and by our Chief Medical Editor, Dr Tim Iveson, Macmillan Consultant Medical Oncologist.

With thanks to: Dr Shobhit Baijal, Consultant Medical Oncologist; Jo Foster, Macmillan Physical Activity Project Manager; Professor Alan Maryon-Davis, Faculty of Public Health; Elaine McNish, Macmillan Physical Activity Manager; Ted Poulter, Cancer Voice & Public Health and Exercise Specialist; Dr Clare Stevinson, Lecturer in Physical Activity and Health; and the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition.

## Sources

We've listed a sample of the sources used in this publication below. If you'd like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at [\*\*bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk\*\*](mailto:bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk)

Davies N, Thomas R, Batehup L. *Advising cancer survivors about lifestyle. A selective review of the evidence.* Macmillan Cancer Support. 2010.

Feuerstein, M. *Handbook of Cancer Survivorship.* Springer. 2007.

Irwin, M. Physical activity interventions for cancer survivors. *British Journal of Sports Medicine.* 2009. 43: 32–38.

Schmitz K, Courneya K, Matthews C, et al. American College of Sports Medicine roundtable on exercise guidelines for cancer survivors. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise.* 2010. 42: 1409–1426.

# Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It's just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They're produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we're there to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.



## **Share your cancer experience**

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

## **Campaign for change**

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

## **Help someone in your community**

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

## **Raise money**

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

## **Give money**

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

**Call us to find out more**

**0300 1000 200**

**[macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved](http://macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved)**

## Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other

Name

Surname

Address

Postcode

Phone

Email

Please accept my gift of £

(Please delete as appropriate)  
I enclose a cheque / postal order /  
Charity Voucher made payable to  
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:  
Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity  
Card / Switch / Maestro

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Security number

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Signature

Date / /

## Don't let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

- I am a UK taxpayer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make in the future, as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in each tax year, that is at least equal to the tax that Charities & CASCs I donate to will reclaim on my gifts. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify and that Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.



If you'd rather donate online go to [macmillan.org.uk/donate](https://macmillan.org.uk/donate)

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to:  
Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851,  
89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

We are the nurses and therapists helping you through treatment. The experts on the end of the phone. The advisers telling you which benefits you're entitled to. The volunteers giving you a hand with the everyday things. The campaigners improving cancer care. The community there for you online, any time. The supporters who make it all possible.

Together, we are all Macmillan Cancer Support.

For cancer support every step of the way, call Macmillan on 0808 808 00 00 (Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm) or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

Hard of hearing? Use telephone 0808 808 0121, or Text Relay.  
Non-English speaker? Interpreters available.  
Braille and large print versions on request.

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**WE ARE  
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