

Cancer and your sex life



About this booklet

This booklet is about how cancer and its treatment can affect your sex life. It is for anyone who needs information before, during or after cancer treatment.

You do not have to be in a relationship or having sex to have questions or need support. We hope you find this information useful, whatever your circumstances, sexual orientation or gender.

The booklet explains:

- how your sex life may be affected by cancer and its treatment
- how to get support and treatment that can help.

How to use this booklet

The booklet is split into sections to help you find what you need. You do not have to read it from start to finish. You can use the [contents list](#) to help you. We also have more information on our website about side effects of cancer treatment that may affect sexual well-being. Visit macmillan.org.uk/sex-and-side-effects

We also have more booklets you might find useful. These include:

- [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#)
- [Cancer and relationships: Support for partners, families and friends.](#)

We cannot give advice about your own situation. You should talk to your doctor, who knows your medical history.

If you are transgender (trans), non-binary or intersex

If you are trans, non-binary or intersex, this booklet is also for you. In some places, we use the words 'male' and 'female' to make it clear which body parts we are talking about. We have tried to use inclusive wording as much as possible.

Quotes

In this booklet, we have included quotes from people with cancer who have chosen to share their story with us. To share your experience, visit [macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory)

For more information

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](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

If you would prefer to speak to us in another language, interpreters are available. Please tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, easy read, Braille, large print, interactive PDF and translations. To order these, visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call **0808 808 00 00**.





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“ My life has been limited by cancer and I deserve to feel pleasure again. ”

Sarah, diagnosed with ovarian and womb cancer

Sex and cancer

You may have questions about sex before, during or after cancer treatment. Different types of support are available. It can help to know [how to start a conversation about sex](#) and how to ask for advice.

It can be difficult to talk about sex and relationships. But it is an important part of life for many people. You do not have to be in a relationship or having sex to have questions or need support.

Cancer and cancer treatment can affect many areas of sexual well-being. They may cause changes that are:

- physical – you may have side effects or symptoms that change how your body works or looks
- emotional – you may be dealing with stress, worry or other difficult feelings
- practical – your usual routines or roles may change.

These areas are often linked. If there is a change in one area, it may affect another.

These changes may affect how you feel about your body. Or they may lower your sex drive (libido) or make you less interested in sex. They can affect your relationships or how you feel about being intimate with another person. You may worry these changes will affect how attractive you are to other people.

Many changes caused by cancer treatment are temporary and usually get better after treatment ends. As you recover, you may find your sex life goes back to the way it was. But some changes may last longer or be permanent.

Sex involves different things for different people. If you do not feel like doing what you normally do with someone, there are other ways to be intimate. This could include:

- kissing
- cuddling
- touching
- holding hands
- a gentle hand, foot or shoulder massage.

Sharing your feelings and spending quality time together can help your emotional connection.

There are so many things to cope with when you have cancer. This may mean your sexual well-being could be forgotten. You may avoid the conversation because you feel embarrassed talking about sex or you may be worried your healthcare team might be. But you can talk to them about anything. There are many ways to improve your sexual well-being and manage any problems. So it is important to talk about it and get the right help.

Who can help?

If your sexual well-being is affected before, during or after cancer treatment, this does not mean your sex life is over. There may be advice, support or treatments that can help. Your healthcare team is a good place to start if you are worried. Try not to let embarrassment stop you from asking for help. Your healthcare team are used to [talking about sex](#).

Talk to your:

- GP or practice nurse
- cancer doctor
- specialist nurse
- local sexual health service
- therapeutic radiographer, if you are having radiotherapy.

They may offer advice or treatments that can help. Or they may refer you to someone else if you need more help. This might be:

- another healthcare professional in your cancer team
- a clinic that manages changes, such as erectile dysfunction or early menopause
- a physiotherapist – a professional who may give you information and exercises that can improve some problems
- a gynaecologist – a doctor who treats female reproductive system problems
- a urologist – a doctor who treats bladder or male reproductive system problems
- an endocrinologist – a doctor who treats hormonal problems such as low testosterone.

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Sometimes it helps to talk about sexual problems. Your healthcare team may arrange for you to talk to a counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist or [sex therapist](#). These professionals all work in different ways. But they can all help you understand and cope with your feelings or any changes.

You may find a support group is a good place to talk. Some groups are for anyone affected by cancer or for a specific cancer type. Others are for [anyone of a specific gender or sexual orientation](#). Some groups meet face to face and others meet online. It can help to talk to people who are in a similar situation or have had the same issues.

You may prefer to get support from a helpline or through email or webchat. These can be anonymous. It might feel easier to talk about sex and ask questions this way.

You can often get support with sexual problems through the NHS. But some services, such as sex therapy, may only be available privately or through another organisation. Your healthcare team can explain what is available in your area.

We have more information about other [useful organisations](#), including helplines and support groups. Or call the Macmillan Support Line if you need more information or just want to talk.

Call the Macmillan Support Line free on
0808 808 00 00, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm.



What is sex therapy?

Sex therapists are experts in sexual well-being. They can help with physical, emotional and relationship issues that affect sexual function or well-being. Some sex therapists are also doctors, nurses or other healthcare professionals, such as radiographers.

A sex therapist will ask questions to understand:

- what is worrying you
- how they might be able to help.

Therapy is confidential. It can help to talk about any sexual problems or worries you have. But you do not have to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with.



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Many people find they need multiple therapy sessions to feel comfortable talking to their therapist.

You can talk to a sex therapist about:

- your sex life before cancer
- your sex life during and after cancer treatment
- any physical sexual difficulties you have
- your thoughts and feelings
- your relationships.

Sex therapy can help you think about any physical changes and how to adjust to those changes. It can also help you explore different ways of enjoying sex. The therapist may suggest exercises to help you with any problems.

Therapists can also help partners. If you have a partner and feel comfortable including them in therapy, this can help you both.

The [College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists and the Institute of Psychosexual Medicine](#) have a list of professional therapists on their websites. [Relate, Relate NI and Relationships Scotland](#) may also be able to offer relationship counselling for a fee.

“ I previously had quite a high sex drive. Would this be affected? Will sex be painful? Will I be able to satisfy someone and will they be able to satisfy me? These were all questions I had. ”

Ali, diagnosed with cervical cancer

Talking about sex with your healthcare team

It can be difficult to start a conversation about sex with someone from your healthcare team. Some people feel embarrassed or uncomfortable talking about something so personal. But it is important to get the right information when you need it. You can ask your healthcare team about anything before, during or after cancer treatment.

A healthcare professional may not ask about your sexual well-being unless they know you want to talk about it. Tell them if you have questions or are worried about anything. They will understand that these questions are important to you. Even if you feel embarrassed, you should ask for information and support. Most healthcare professionals are used to having these conversations.

Some cancer teams use a questionnaire such as a Holistic Needs Assessment (HNA). This is usually a tick-box form that you complete before meeting with your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or radiographer. It helps them understand how you are feeling and what worries you have. You can use this to tell them if you have questions about sex or relationships. You may find our booklet [Holistic Needs Assessment: Planning your care and support](#) helpful.

We also have more information about HNAs on our website. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/your-hna](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/your-hna)



Tips for talking

You may find it useful to prepare before you talk to a healthcare professional. You may find some of the following tips helpful:

- Think about who you want to talk to. Is there someone in your healthcare team you feel more comfortable with?
- Think about what information you want. For example, you may want to know why you have lost interest in sex since starting treatment, whether it will improve and what might help.
- Write down the questions you want to ask.
- Practise what you want to say.
- At the start of your appointment, tell the healthcare professional you would like some time to ask questions.
- Do not worry about using the right medical words about sex or your body. Use the words you understand and feel comfortable using.
- If something is not clear, ask the healthcare professional to explain again.

If you are LGBTQ+

Your healthcare team are there to support you and treat you in a way you feel comfortable with. There may be times when it helps them to know your gender identity or sexual orientation. It may help you feel supported. And your healthcare team can give the right information and support to you and your partner, if you have one.

The side effects of cancer treatments are often the same whatever your sexual orientation or gender identity. But as an LGBTQ+ person, you may have some specific questions about how these may affect your sexual well-being. And some side effects may be more of a problem depending on your body and the type of sex you have.

If your healthcare team cannot help, they can refer you to a [sex therapist](#) or another specialist who can. Or you may be able to get advice and support from:

- your [local sexual health service](#)
- a [transgender sexual health service](#)
- the [LGBT Foundation](#).

Many people have good relationships with their healthcare team. But sometimes it can be more complicated. Support is available if you feel you have been treated unfairly or are unhappy with your treatment. The [Equality Advisory and Support Service \(EASS\)](#) can give advice and support if you are in England, Scotland or Wales. If you are in Northern Ireland, contact the [Equality Commission for Northern Ireland](#).

We have more information about navigating healthcare, cancer and cancer treatment in our booklet [LGBTQ+ people and cancer](#). We also have information specifically about transgender and non-binary people and cancer at [macmillan.org.uk/trans-and-non-binary](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/trans-and-non-binary)





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Making treatment decisions

You and your doctors will talk about your treatment options and the possible risks and benefits before you agree (consent) to have treatment. They will explain whether treatment is likely to cause physical changes to your sex life. For example, some treatments cause physical changes to the pelvic area. Or they may affect levels of hormones in the body.

Your healthcare team will also explain whether treatment is likely to affect your fertility – this is your ability to have children. There may be ways to protect your fertility. It is important to talk to your healthcare team about this before your treatment starts. We have more information about cancer and fertility you may find helpful in our booklets [Cancer and fertility](#) and [Side effects of cancer treatment](#).

It is important to understand the possible benefits and risks of your treatment. It helps you and your cancer team decide on a treatment plan that is right for you. Everyone has different things that are important to them.

You can order our booklets and leaflets for free.
Visit be.macmillan.org.uk or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.



Your sex life during treatment

Some people worry about whether it is safe to have sex after being diagnosed with cancer. It is important to remember that sexual touching, penetration or close physical contact:

- cannot pass cancer on to a partner
- will not affect the cancer
- do not make cancer more likely to come back.

If you feel like having sex, it is usually safe to do so. Some people find they still enjoy sex and want to keep their sex life as normal as possible.

But you should not put pressure on yourself to have sex or be intimate. Cancer and treatment can affect your sex drive in different ways. You may not feel interested or ready to have sex for a time before, during or after treatment.

Some cancer treatments may change how the body works sexually. This may include:

- surgery or radiotherapy to the pelvic area – the area below your tummy (abdomen) and between your hips
- hormone therapy – this is often used to treat breast or prostate cancer
- chemotherapy – if this causes an early menopause
- surgery or radiotherapy to the pituitary gland or brain.

Other treatments cause general side effects that can change how you feel about your body or having sex. For example, treatment might cause tiredness (fatigue) or pain or make you feel sick. This may mean you are less interested in sex. If your body or appearance changes in some way, this can also affect how you feel about your body and sex. We have more information in our booklet [Body image and cancer](#) you may find useful.

Your cancer doctor, nurse or radiographer will explain what to expect. They will also tell you whether you need to make changes to your sex life because of a treatment. Examples of these changes include the following:

- You may have had surgery or radiotherapy to the pelvic area. Your body may need time to heal properly before having vaginal or anal sex.
- If you now have difficulty keeping an erection, you may need to take medication or use equipment to help.
- You may have had certain types of internal radiotherapy such as seed brachytherapy or radioisotope therapy. In this case, you may be told to avoid close physical contact for a short time. This is to protect partners from radiation.
- You may have had high-dose chemotherapy or a stem cell transplant. In this case, you will be advised not to have close physical contact with anyone for a while. This is to protect you from infection. Your cancer doctor or specialist nurse will explain more about this.



“ My wife emphasised the sensual side of sex and the need to ‘make love’ and not just enjoy sex sessions – this was an enormous help. ”

Elvin, diagnosed with prostate cancer

Having sex during treatment

If you have sex during cancer treatment, it is important to prevent a pregnancy and to protect yourself and any partners.

Preventing pregnancy

Some cancer treatments can be harmful to an unborn baby – for example, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. During your treatment and for a time after, it is important to use contraception if you or a partner could become pregnant.

Even if your cancer treatment is likely to damage your fertility, you may still be able to start a pregnancy. Your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or radiographer can tell you more about this.

If you are of childbearing age, you may be asked to take a pregnancy test before starting some types of treatment.

There are many different types of contraception. Ask your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or radiographer which type is best for you. This depends on you and the type of cancer treatment you are having. Condoms or caps (diaphragms) can be used during any type of cancer treatment.

Some hormonal contraceptives may not work during cancer treatment – for example, the pill, patch, injection or implants. This can be because of:

- the drugs you are taking
- side effects, such as diarrhoea and vomiting.

Your doctor, nurse or radiographer can tell you more about what types of contraception are safe for you to use.

Protecting partners

Small amounts of chemotherapy or other drugs can get into your body fluids. This includes fluid made in the vagina and the fluid that contains sperm. To protect any partners, your cancer doctor may advise that during treatment and for a few days after certain drugs, you use:

- a condom for vaginal or anal sex
- a condom or a latex barrier, such as a dental dam, for oral sex.

Your cancer doctor or specialist nurse can give you more information about your treatment. If you use a [lubricant](#), only use a silicone-based or water-based product with condoms or dental dams.

If you are having external beam radiotherapy, there is no risk to your partner during sex. But you should use contraception to prevent getting pregnant or making someone pregnant. If you are having brachytherapy to the pelvis, your radiographer will give you more information about sex during treatment.

Protecting yourself

Your cancer doctor, nurse or radiographer may also advise using condoms during chemotherapy and radiotherapy to help reduce irritation.

During treatment, you should do the following:

- Avoid giving oral sex if you have cuts or sores in your mouth. There is a risk these could become infected.
- Tell your doctor if you notice any bleeding after sex. If the bleeding does not stop, contact the hospital straight away.
- Use a condom and some silicone-based or water-based lubricant if you give or receive anal sex. This helps prevent bleeding or infection.
- Never use the same condom for anal then vaginal or oral sex.
- Clean sex toys, dildos or other objects before you use them. Or cover them with a condom. If you use one for anal sex, clean it or change the condom before you use it for vaginal sex. If a partner uses it too, clean it or change the condom before you use it again.

Using condoms and dental dams helps protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This is especially important if your cancer treatment affects how your body fights infections. Again, if you use a lubricant, only use a silicone-based or water-based product with condoms or dental dams.

Lubricants

Lubricants are gels or liquids you can use before or during sex. Using lubricant can make penetration or sexual touching feel good. It can also make it feel easier and more comfortable.

Lubricants can be water-based, silicone-based or oil-based. Always check the instructions to confirm what type you are using. Try to use ones that do not contain anything that can cause irritation, such as:

- scents
- spermicides
- preservatives
- parabens.

There are many different brands of lubricant. Some products are available through the NHS. Your cancer team can explain which type would be best for you. Types of lubricants include YES®, Sylk® and SUTIL Luxe®.

Some people find that using a water-based lubricant and an oil-based lubricant together is helpful – for example, YES® double glide. Others find that silicone-based lubricants can last a bit longer than water-based.

You should only use a silicone-based or water-based lubricant with a condom, dental dam, latex cap (diaphragm) and latex sex toys. Oil-based lubricants can make condoms, dental dams and latex caps tear. This stops them from working.

You can buy lubricants from a pharmacy, your local supermarket or online.

Your thoughts and feelings

Your thoughts and feelings have a powerful effect on your sexual well-being. Being diagnosed with cancer can cause strong emotions. You may not feel like having sex if you feel worried, anxious or depressed.

We have more information about coping with your feelings in our booklet [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer.](#)

How you feel about yourself sexually may also change if you:

- are feeling less in control
- feel weak or tired
- feel your role has changed at home or work
- have changes to how your body looks or works.

Being less interested in sex is a normal reaction to what you are going through. This can often get better with time as you recover from treatment or get back to everyday activities.

Talking about it

Whatever feelings you have, it can help to talk to someone. You may not need advice, but it can be helpful to have someone just listen.

Try to find someone you trust and feel comfortable talking to. This could be a [partner, family member, friend or healthcare professional](#).

Talking to someone who has been through a similar treatment or situation can help. Your cancer team may be able to arrange this for you. Or you could join a cancer support group, such as our [Online Community](#).

Talking to a partner

If you are in a relationship, try to be honest about how you feel. If cancer or treatment has changed how you feel about your body or sex, tell your partner. This gives them the chance to understand and support you. They may also have questions. Try to listen to and answer each other's questions and concerns.

Coping with cancer can change relationships. For some people, working through difficulties and facing cancer together makes their relationship stronger. But it is not always like this.

Some people find that while they are having treatment, their relationship changes to be a 'cared for' and 'carer' role. Once they finish treatment, it can take time to adjust to returning to more balanced roles.

Some professionals who help you may also be able to help your partner, or both of you as a couple. [Relate, Relate NI and Relationships Scotland](#) may also be able to help.

We have more information for partners you may find helpful in our booklet [Cancer and relationships: Support for partners, families and friends](#).

Starting a new relationship

If you are still having cancer treatment, you may worry a new partner may not understand what you are going through. If you meet someone after you have finished cancer treatment, they may not know you had cancer.

You might not want to talk about it. Or you may feel it is too soon to tell them. If the cancer has affected your body, sexual well-being or fertility, you may worry about how a new partner will react.

It is your decision how, when and what you tell a new partner. Some people want to be open about their experiences from the start of a relationship. Others choose to wait. It can help to talk to someone else you trust before deciding what to do.



“ My confidence regarding relationships reduced. Meeting someone new, would they be attracted to me now? The only way I got my answers was when I met someone and had to take the plunge. It was all good. ”

Ali, diagnosed with cervical cancer



Sex and side effects

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Side effects and your sexual well-being

Treatment for cancer usually causes some side effects. These depend on the type of treatment you have. Treatment affects each person differently. Before you start a treatment, your cancer team will explain what side effects you are most likely to have.

Some side effects may affect your general well-being. This can also affect your sexual well-being. For example, you may feel less interested in sex if you feel unwell or tired.

“ I didn’t feel like having sex while I was having treatment. But after treatment, I started to gain my confidence again. ”

Michael, diagnosed with leukaemia

Other side effects can change your appearance and body image. This may affect your confidence or how you feel about your body and sex. This might include a visible change, such as scars or losing your hair. It could also be something less visible, such as bladder or bowel problems, or having a stoma. We have more information you may find helpful in our booklet [Body image and cancer](#).

There are also side effects that change how your body and sex organs work during sex. These may happen if a treatment affects your levels of sex hormones. Or they can happen if a treatment damages tissue, nerves or blood vessels in the pelvic area. These side effects may include:

- changes in sexual sensation
- erection or ejaculation problems
- vaginal dryness or other vaginal changes
- anal or rectal changes
- loss of sex drive.

The treatments most likely to cause these types of side effect are:

- surgery or radiotherapy to the pelvic area
- surgery or radiotherapy to areas of the brain that make hormones
- drugs that affect hormone levels – for example, hormonal therapy drugs for breast or prostate cancer.

We have more information about pelvic radiotherapy you may find useful in our [Understanding pelvic radiotherapy](#) booklet.

More information about side effects

We have detailed information on our website about coping with side effects that may affect your sexual well-being. This includes things that might help and information about where to get support.

Our webpages include more information on:

- sex and side effects at [macmillan.org.uk/sex-and-side-effects](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/sex-and-side-effects)
- vaginal changes, sexual wellbeing and cancer at [macmillan.org.uk/female-pelvic-side-effects](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/female-pelvic-side-effects)
- erection problems, sexual wellbeing and cancer at [macmillan.org.uk/male-pelvic-side-effects](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/male-pelvic-side-effects)

We also have more general information you may find helpful in our booklets:

- [Side effects of cancer treatment](#)
- [Body image and cancer](#)
- [Feel more like you](#)
- [Coping with hair loss.](#)

Your sexual well-being and relationships may also be affected by more than just physical changes. You may find the following booklets useful:

- [How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer](#)
- [Cancer and relationships: Support for partners, families and friends.](#)

You can order our booklets and leaflets for free.

Visit be.macmillan.org.uk or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.





The body and sex

Certain parts of the body are involved in wanting and having sex. It helps to know what happens to the body during sex. You may find it helpful when reading our information about [side effects](#) or [talking to a healthcare professional](#).

If you have had gender-affirming surgery or are intersex, your body may be different in some ways to what we describe here. If you cannot find the right information for you, a non-binary and transgender (trans)-friendly sexual health and well-being service may be able to help. You can check whether this is available on [Tranzwiki](#). Or you could contact the [UK Cancer and Transition Service \(UCATS\)](#) for more information.

What happens to your body during sex

Your body may go through different stages. This is sometimes called the sexual response:

- Arousal – this is when you feel 'turned on' and ready for sex.
- Plateau – this is a stage of arousal where your body is very sensitive to touch.
- Orgasm – this is a feeling of intense pleasure that may happen after being aroused. It is also called climax or 'coming'.
- Resolution – the stage after arousal and orgasm. The physical changes in the body go back to normal.

The sexual response is different for each person. What feels good for you depends on:

- how your brain responds to a physical sensation
- how you feel emotionally
- your memories, beliefs and experiences.

The brain, body and hormones

The brain is one of the most important parts of the body when it comes to sex. The brain tells you what feels good. It also helps control what happens to your body during sex. This includes how the sex organs in your pelvis work when you are aroused or orgasm. The pelvis is the area between your hips and below the belly button.

For women, trans men and other people assigned female at birth, the sex organs you were born with include the:

- vulva
- clitoris
- vagina.

For men, trans women and other people assigned male at birth, the sex organs you were born with include the:

- penis
- testicles
- prostate.

The brain uses nerves and hormones to send and receive messages around the body.

Nerves are cells that send messages from the brain to other areas of the body. They send the brain information about what is happening in an area. They also allow the brain to send instructions to that area of the body. For example, nerves allow the brain to tell your eye muscles to move and make the pupils smaller in bright light – or to send more blood to the sex organs when aroused.

Hormones are chemical messengers. The brain uses them to control many body functions. These include:

- your interest in sex – this is called your sex drive or libido
- sperm production and the ability to get and keep an erection
- periods (menstruation) and the ability to get pregnant (fertility).

The main sex hormones are made in the testicles, the ovaries and in areas of the brain, such as the pituitary gland.

Eventually, the ovaries stop making hormones. This is called the menopause. It usually happens between the ages of about 45 and 55. Changing levels of hormones during the menopause can cause symptoms that include lack of interest in sex and vaginal dryness.

We have more information and illustrations on our website about the body and sex. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/the-body-and-sex](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/the-body-and-sex)



“ My mood had previously been lower. I was of course happy to be alive – but after some time I got my sexual function back and that definitely boosted my mood. ”

Sean, diagnosed with prostate cancer



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About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

Our information has the PIF Tick quality mark for trusted health information. This means our information has been through a professional and strong production process.

Order what you need

You may want to order more booklets or leaflets like this one. Visit be.macmillan.org.uk or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets about different cancer types, treatments and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer treatment and information for carers, family and friends.

Online information

All our information is also available online at macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support You can also find videos featuring stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- easy read booklets
- interactive PDFs
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at macmillan.org.uk/otherformats

If you would like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

The language we use

We want everyone affected by cancer to feel our information is written for them.

We want our information to be as clear as possible. To do this, we try to:

- use plain English
- explain medical words
- use short sentences
- use illustrations to explain text
- structure the information clearly
- make sure important points are clear.

We use gender-inclusive language and talk to our readers as 'you' so that everyone feels included. Where clinically necessary we use the terms 'men' and 'women' or 'male' and 'female'. For example, we do so when talking about parts of the body or mentioning statistics or research about who is affected.

To find out more about how we produce our information, visit [macmillan.org.uk/ourinfo](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/ourinfo)



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we are here to support you.

Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Call us on **0808 808 00 00**. We can:

- help with any medical questions you have about cancer or your treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial guidance
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Our trained cancer information advisers can listen and signpost you to further support.

Our cancer information nurse specialists can talk you through information about your diagnosis and treatment. They can help you understand what to expect from your diagnosis and provide information to help you manage symptoms and side effects.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

You can also email us, or use the Macmillan Chat Service via our website. You can use the chat service to ask our advisers about anything that is worrying you. Tell them what you would like to talk about so they can direct your chat to the right person. Click on the 'Chat to us' button, which appears on pages across the website. Or go to [macmillan.org.uk/talktous](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/talktous)

If you would like to talk to someone in a language other than English, we also offer an interpreter service for our Macmillan Support Line. Call **0808 808 00 00** and say, in English, the language you want to use. Or send us a web chat message saying you would like an interpreter. Let us know the language you need and we'll arrange for an interpreter to contact you.

Macmillan Information and Support Centres

Our Information and Support Centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. Visit one to get the information you need and speak with someone face to face. If you would like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone confidentially.

Find your nearest centre at [macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you have been affected in this way, we can help. Please note the opening times may vary by service.

Financial guidance

Our financial team can give you guidance on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.

Help accessing benefits

Our welfare rights advisers can help you find out what benefits you might be entitled to, and help you complete forms and apply for benefits. They can also tell you more about other financial help that may be available to you. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport) to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

Help with energy costs

Our energy advisers can help if you have difficulty paying your energy bills (gas, electricity and water). They can help you get access to schemes and charity grants to help with bills, advise you on boiler schemes and help you deal with water companies.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing, to changes needed to your home.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to find out more about Macmillan Grants.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you are an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide support and information to help you manage cancer at work. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)

Work support

Our dedicated team of work support advisers can help you understand your rights at work. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a work support adviser.

Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That is why we help bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, family member or friend, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport

Online Community

Thousands of people use our Online Community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at macmillan.org.uk/community

You can also use our Ask an Expert service on the Online Community. You can ask a financial guide, cancer information nurse, work support advisor or an information and support advisor any questions you have.

Macmillan healthcare professionals

Our nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support. Details correct at time of printing.

Bladder or bowel changes

Bladder & Bowel UK

Tel **0161 214 4591**

www.bbuk.org.uk

Offers advice and information on bladder and bowel problems, practical tips on symptom management and solutions to promote quality of life and independent living.

Bladder and Bowel Community

Home Delivery Service **0800 031 5406**

Email **help@bladderandbowel.org**

www.bladderandbowel.org

Provides information and support for people living with conditions that affect their bladder or bowel.

Colostomy UK

24-hour Stoma Helpline **0800 328 4257**

www.colostomyuk.org

Provides information and support about living with a stoma.

IA – Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Association

Tel **0800 018 4724**

www.iasupport.org

Supports anyone who has had, or is about to have, their colon removed and has an ileostomy or internal pouch.

Urostomy Association

Tel **0122 391 0854**

www.urostomyassociation.org.uk

Offers help and support for people who are about to have, or have had, surgery resulting in the diversion or removal of the bladder.

Body image changes

Changing Faces

Support Line **0300 012 0275**

www.changingfaces.org.uk

Provides advice and support for people with a visible difference: a mark, scar or condition that makes them look different.

Outsiders

Email sexdis@outsiders.org.uk

www.outsiders.org.uk

A social, peer support and dating club, run by and for socially and physically Disabled people. Offers support on relationships, sexuality, dating and sexual services, including a helpline.

Counselling and sex therapy

College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists (COSRT)

Tel **0208 106 9635**

www.cosrt.org.uk

Provides information about sexual well-being, including having therapy and finding a therapist. Has a list of professional therapists on the website.

The Institute of Psychosexual Medicine

Tel **0207 580 0631**

www.ipm.org.uk

Provides information about sexual difficulties, including a list of doctors who are trained in psychosexual medicine.

Relate

www.relate.org.uk

Offers a range of services to help with couple and family relationships. Available face to face, by phone and online.

Relate NI

www.relateni.org

Offers counselling services to support people and their relationships across Northern Ireland. Available face to face, by phone and online.

Relationships Scotland

Tel **0345 119 2020**

www.relationships-scotland.org.uk

Provides relationship counselling, family mediation, child contact centres and many other forms of family support services across all of mainland and island Scotland.

LGBT-specific support

LGBT Foundation

Tel **0345 330 3030**

lgbt.foundation

Provides a range of services to the LGBT community, including a helpline, email advice and counselling. The website has information on various topics including sexual health, relationships, mental health, community groups and events.

OUTpatients (formerly called Live Through This)

www.outpatients.org.uk

A safe space for anybody who identifies as part of the queer spectrum and has had an experience with any kind of cancer at any stage. Also produces resources about LGBT cancer experiences. OUTpatients runs a peer support group with Maggie's Barts.

Pink Therapy

www.pinktherapy.com

Aims to promote high-quality therapy and training services for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, and others who identify as being gender or sexual diversities. Provides an online list of qualified therapists who adopt a sexuality-affirmative stance and do not see sexual or gender variation as a sickness.

Switchboard

Helpline **0800 011 9100**

www.switchboard.lgbt

Provides a safe space for anyone to discuss anything, including sexuality, gender identity, sexual health and emotional well-being.

Tranzwiki Directory

www.gires.org.uk/tranzwiki

A directory of non-commercial groups and organisations supporting or assisting trans and gender diverse individuals, their families and friends across the UK.

Prostate cancer support

Out with Prostate Cancer

Tel **0794 488 6043**

www.outwithprostatecancer.org.uk

A prostate cancer support group directed primarily at gay and bisexual men, trans women and non-binary people. Offers support and practical information to those who face the many challenges that come with a diagnosis of prostate cancer.

Prostate Cancer UK

Helpline **0800 074 8383**

www.prostatecanceruk.org

Provides information and support for people affected by prostate cancer.

Gynaecological cancer support

The Eve Appeal

Tel **0808 802 0019**

www.eveappeal.org.uk

Raises awareness of, and fund research into the 5 gynaecological cancers – womb, ovarian, cervical, vulval and vaginal.

Ovacome

Helpline **0800 008 7054**

www.ovacome.org.uk

A national support group for everyone involved with ovarian cancer, including patients, carers, families, friends and healthcare professionals.

Menopause support

The Daisy Network

www.daisynetwork.org

A support group for women who have an early menopause.

Menopause and cancer

www.menopauseandcancer.org

Supports people affected by menopause and cancer.

Sexual health services

Your local sexual health service can give you free and confidential information about:

- contraception
- sex and relationships
- sexually transmitted infections
- health and well-being.

Find your nearest service:

England

National Sexual Health Helpline **0300 123 7123**

www.nhs.uk/service-search/sexual-health

Scotland

Information Line **0800 22 44 88**

www.nhsinform.scot/scotlands-service-directory/sexual-health-clinics

Wales

Sexual Health Helpline **0800 567 123**

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices

Northern Ireland

www.sexualhealthni.info

Transgender sexual health services

Local sexual health services aim to provide support to people of all gender identities. Some areas have separate clinics and waiting areas for men or for women. Some areas have a clinic for trans people. If you are not comfortable going to any of these clinics, it may help to call first and ask for advice.

The [LGBT Foundation](#) also provides information and resources for trans people on their website.

UK Cancer and Transition Service (UCATS)

Tel **0203 315 9576**

www.wearetransplus.co.uk

UCATS is a new service for the trans and non-binary community who have been affected by cancer.

Equal rights advice

Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)

Tel **0808 800 0082**

www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Offers free advice and assistance about equality and human rights issues for people in England, Scotland and Wales.

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Tel **0289 050 0600**

www.equalityni.org

Provides free advice and assistance for people in Northern Ireland who feel they have been discriminated against.

General cancer support organisations

Black Women Rising

www.blackwomenrisinguk.org

Aims to educate, inspire and bring opportunities for women from the BAME community. Shares stories and supports Black cancer patients and survivors through treatment and remission.

Cancer Black Care

www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Provides support for all those living with and affected by cancer, with an emphasis on Black people and people of colour.

Cancer Focus Northern Ireland

Helpline **0800 783 3339**

www.cancerfocusni.org

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland.

Cancer Research UK

Helpline **0808 800 4040**

www.cancerresearchuk.org

A UK-wide organisation that has patient information on all types of cancer. Also has a clinical trials database.

Cancer Support Scotland

Tel **0800 652 4531**

www.cancersupportscotland.org

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

Macmillan Cancer Voices

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.

Maggie's

Tel **0300 123 1801**

www.maggies.org

Has a network of centres in many locations throughout the UK. Provides free information about cancer and financial benefits. Also offers emotional and social support to people with cancer, their family and friends.

Penny Brohn UK

Helpline **0303 3000 118**

www.pennybrohn.org.uk

Offers physical, emotional and spiritual support across the UK, using complementary therapies and self-help techniques.

Tenovus

Helpline **0808 808 1010**

www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk

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

Counselling

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Tel **0145 588 3300**

www.bacp.co.uk

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services across the UK. You can also search for a qualified counsellor on the 'Therapist directory' page.

UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Tel **0207 014 9955**

www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Holds the national register of psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors, listing practitioners who meet exacting standards and training requirements.

Emotional and mental health support

Mind

Helpline **0300 123 3393**

www.mind.org.uk

Provides information, advice and support to anyone with a mental health problem through its helpline and website.

Samaritans

Helpline **116 123**

Email jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Provides confidential and non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

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 photos 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 members of Macmillan's Centre of Clinical Expertise.

With thanks to:

Loryn Caulfield, Consultant Therapeutic Radiographer;
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Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and those who shared their stories.

We welcome feedback on our information. If you have any, please contact informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk

Sources

Below is a sample of the sources used in our sex and cancer information. If you would like more information about the sources we use, please contact us at informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk

Katz A, Agrawal LS, Sirohi B. Sexuality after cancer as an unmet need: addressing disparities, achieving equality. American Society of Clinical Oncology Educational Book. 2022 Apr; (42):1–7. doi:10.1200/edbk_100032

Sousa Rodrigues Guedes T, Barbosa Otoni Gonçalves Guedes M, de Castro Santana R, Costa da Silva JF, Almeida Gomes Dantas A, Ochandorena-Acha M, et al. Sexual dysfunction in women with cancer: a systematic review of longitudinal studies. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. 2022 Sep 21;19(19):11921. doi:10.3390/ijerph191911921

Wittmann D, Mehta A, McCaughan E, Faraday M, Duby A, Matthew A, et al. Guidelines for sexual health care for prostate cancer patients: recommendations of an international panel. Movember. 2022. Available from: <https://truenorth.movember.com/images/assets/SexualHealthGuidelines.pdf>

Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It is just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer.

They are 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 are here 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.

5 ways you can help someone with cancer

1. Share your cancer experience

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

2. 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.

3. 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?

4. Raise money

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

5. Give money

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

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

Card number

Valid from

Expiry date

Issue no

Security number

Signature

Date / /

Do not 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 tax payer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I make or have made to Macmillan Cancer Support in the last 4 years as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand 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 would rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate



This booklet is about sex and cancer. It explains how cancer and its treatment may affect your sex life. This booklet is for anyone who needs information before, during or after cancer treatment.

The booklet includes information about how to manage these changes and what help and support is available.


At Macmillan, we give people with cancer everything we've got. If you are diagnosed, your worries are our worries. We will help you live life as fully as you can.

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call **0808 808 00 00** or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Would you prefer to speak to us in another language? Interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use. Are you deaf or hard of hearing? Call us using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, interactive PDFs, easy read, Braille, large print and translations.

To order these, visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call our support line.

The logo consists of a blue rounded rectangle containing the text 'Trusted Information Creator' in black. To the right of the text is a large green checkmark.

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