

# YOUR FEELINGS AFTER CANCER TREATMENT

Cancer can affect a person's life in many different ways. So how you feel after cancer treatment may be very different to other people. There can be many reasons why you feel the way you do.

As you have fewer hospital visits and start to recover from the side effects of treatment, you may begin to feel relieved and hopeful. You may need to take it slowly at first, but doing some of the activities you did before cancer treatment may help you to feel more positive.

It's understandable that having cancer can make you feel uncertain about the future. And it's natural for this to continue after cancer treatment has ended. Taking control of the things you can do something about can help feelings of uncertainty.

Other feelings you may have include isolation or loneliness, a loss of confidence, or anger. You may find these feelings come and go at different times. And some days they may feel stronger than others.

Talking about how you feel with someone close can make it easier to cope.

## Your feelings after treatment

Everyone's experience of cancer and how it affects their life can be different. Cancer can be life-changing, and many people feel that things will never be the same again when treatment is over.

You may not always stop feeling the physical or emotional effects of cancer just because you have finished treatment. You may be feeling a mixture of emotions including relief, fear, loneliness and anger. If your body has changed because of treatment, the **way you feel about yourself** may also be affected.

You may find these feelings come and go at different times. And some days they may feel stronger than others.

Many people find ways of coping with their emotions. You may find it easy to talk about how you feel and have people you can speak to. Some people often find that over time their feelings become easier to cope with. But it won't be like this for everyone. It can take time for everything to go back to normal, and this may not happen as quickly as you expect.

In some cases, things won't ever be the same as they were before. And if you had low moods or depression before you had cancer, you may find these problems are worse after treatment.

You may have more time to think and reflect on your illness and what you've been through. You may find feelings you weren't aware of suddenly come to the surface. Some people find they're still struggling to cope with their feelings weeks, months or even longer after their initial treatment has ended.

Talking about your feelings can help you understand and manage them. This isn't always easy. We have some advice on **putting your feelings into words**.

## Feeling relieved and hopeful

Once the main part of your treatment is over, you may feel relieved. You don't have to visit the hospital as much and you can start to recover from the side effects of treatment.

You may start to think about having a holiday, going back to work, or doing some of the regular things you used to do.

These might be hobbies or just seeing friends. You may need to take it slowly at first but doing these activities again may help you feel better about yourself and your life.

You may have been encouraged to 'think positively' during your treatment. This may be something you hear even more after your treatment is over. But it's not always that easy. A lot of people have times where they feel low and this is natural. Being positive doesn't mean you have to feel happy all the time. It's a positive thing to acknowledge and talk about your feelings.

Some people feel a positive thing to come out of the cancer is a new outlook on life. You may feel like you can become a different person, stop or take on new work, change your lifestyle or do things you've always dreamed of. It can give you a greater appreciation of family, friends and life itself.

## Uncertainty

Feeling that we have some control over our lives gives us a sense of security and allows us to enjoy the things we do. Having had cancer can take away your sense of security and control. This can be very frightening.

It's natural to want to know what is likely to happen to you, so that you can plan for the future. But at the end of treatment there can still be uncertainty, even when you've been told that everything has gone well.

You may find yourself asking some of these questions:

- What happens now?
- Will I ever get back to how I was before?
- Will I be able to go back to work?
- Will I be able to have children?
- Will the cancer come back and, if so, when?

For some people, their treatment may have been aimed at curing the cancer, so they hope that they can put it all behind them. Others may have been told that the cancer is likely to come back, but no one can say for sure if and when this will happen. Feeling **worried about your cancer coming back** is normal.

Uncertainty can cause a lot of tension. You may feel irritable, angry and frightened. It's difficult to make plans when you can't be sure about the future. And even if you ask your doctors what's likely to happen, you may find that their answers are vague because they can't say for certain.

If you're finding this uncertainty hard to live with, try taking control of the things you can do something about. Getting back into a routine will help. As you get your strength back, you'll be able to do more of your usual activities.

Making some **changes to your diet** or to your work-life balance can help. You may also want to think about using **complementary therapies** for relaxation and to reduce stress.

You may find it helpful to know other people have the same kinds of feelings as you.

## Isolation and feeling alone

It's very common for people with cancer to feel lonely and isolated. This isolation can affect people at different times during their illness. Sometimes this feeling stays after treatment ends.

There can be many reasons why you might feel alone. You may be coping with **changes to your appearance** which make you feel different from those around you. This could be because of weight loss or losing your hair. This can be hard to cope with, especially if the differences aren't obvious to everyone.

You may still feel lonely even if you're surrounded by family or friends, because it can seem like no one understands what you've been through. Many people feel they have to be brave and don't want to upset their family and friends.

You may spend a lot more time on your own now. Your family and friends might not realise that you're feeling lonely, or they may assume that you're enjoying having time to yourself.

Some people may even feel a sense of grief or loss after treatment. This may be for the things you used to do but now can't keep doing. You may miss the routine of appointments, or the relationships you had with hospital staff. But some people find doing new things to fill the gaps can help, such as work or hobbies.

If you're back at work, you may feel isolated from your colleagues. This might be because you don't feel comfortable

talking about your experiences, or because people avoid talking to you about it. If you don't normally work at home but you are at the moment, you may feel like you're missing out.

Feelings of isolation may be worse if you find it difficult to talk about yourself and your emotions. It can be hard to talk to others about how you really feel, especially if you sense that they think you should be able to get on with life now and 'feel fine'.

You may tell them you're okay when you're not. You may find yourself giving people other reasons for not being yourself, such as 'I'm just feeling tired'.

Talking about it can help you feel less alone. You may think that your family and friends are too busy to chat, or worry that you might be a burden to them. But you may find their responses surprising and reassuring. We have more information about [telling people how you really feel](#).

## Loss of confidence

Having cancer can make you feel vulnerable. Your life may have worked around hospital visits and getting support from hospital staff, friends or family members. After treatment ends, it can seem as though you've become dependent on others.

This may make you feel like you have no control over your life.

Cancer and its treatments can change a person's role in their family or at work. Many people feel that these roles are an important part of their identity and if they change, it can affect their confidence.

Your social life often has to change after treatment. This can affect your confidence as you may not have the contact you once had with friends or colleagues. You can still feel tired and stressed after all you've been through, and the social things you used to do may be much more difficult.

It can take time for your strength to return. Some people have a loss of concentration too. This is sometimes called 'chemo brain'. Things you used to find easy may now be much more difficult, like reading a book or making small decisions. This can make you lose confidence in your abilities.

Getting back into these activities will take time. You'll probably build up your strength and confidence gradually. Setting yourself manageable goals can help. As you achieve these, your confidence will grow. Doing little things to reward yourself can help. This could be a trip to the cinema or doing something you enjoyed before you had cancer.

## Anger

It's natural to feel angry when you've had cancer. You may feel angry about going through treatment and having to cope with the side effects. You may be angry about the impact the cancer has had on your life. It may have affected your ability to work, your relationships and family life. Anger can also hide other feelings, such as fear or sadness.

We all express our anger in different ways. Some people might be impatient, or raise their voice. Others may get very upset and tearful. You may often direct your anger at the people closest to you. Letting others know that your anger is not about them, but about your situation, can be helpful. It means you can express your feelings and not bottle them up.

Try not to feel guilty about your angry thoughts or irritable moods. Anger can be a very powerful emotion, and you may find you can use it in a more positive way. It may give you the determination to start something new. This could be something like starting a new hobby or signing up to a sports challenge. Or these feelings may help you clarify what's important in your life.

If you're finding your feelings of anger are starting to affect your life in a negative way, you may find it helpful to [talk to a counsellor or psychologist](#).

## Your spirituality

Not everyone is religious or spiritual. But some people affected by cancer may discover this side of themselves during or after their treatment. Having cancer and finishing treatment can strengthen some people's beliefs. Other people may have reconsidered them. They may have changed what they believe or have discovered new beliefs.

If you're having some of these feelings, you may want to talk to someone about them. This could be a partner, close friend, spiritual or religious leader, or a hospital chaplain.

## Thanks

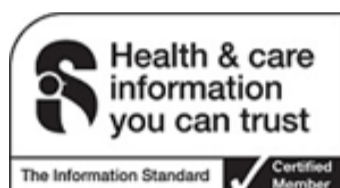
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Our information is also reviewed by people affected by cancer to ensure it is as relevant and accessible as possible. Thank you to all those people who reviewed what you're reading and have helped our information to develop.

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