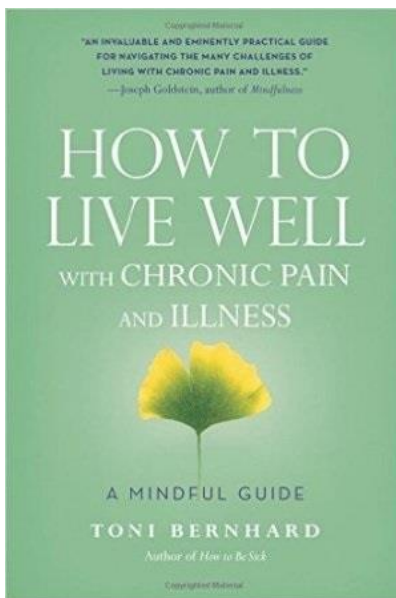


**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**

# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**How to live well with chronic pain and illness. A mindful guide (2015)**

Bernhard T.

Somerville, MA, USA: Wisdom Publications, 2015.

xiv, 338pp.

ISBN 9781614292487.

**Average star rating 4.0 (out of 5)**

**Macmillan Cancer Support  
89 Albert Embankment  
London SE1 7UQ**

**These reviews were written by people affected by cancer and are their personal views and are not the views of Macmillan Cancer Support. These reviews, and the publications reviewed, 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 review or publication or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. For more information about the review process and how to get involved, please go to the end of this document.**



This book would be useful to read during and after the effects of cancer and its treatment. There is a lot of information, but it is well ordered. It is easy to understand, but not sure if you want details about circulatory and heart system and the excretory system when you're in pain and suffering. There are no pictures.

It is excellent and covers all knowledge of how and when to deal with chronic pain and cancer. I like that it gives you a variety of options how and when to deal with chronic pain, how to appreciate yourself, and healing methods. It's a book you can pick up now and again and use as a reference. Well worth a read.

**Breast cancer patient (46-55) (December 2016)**

This is a good quality book, very well laid out and easy to understand. The topics are in a logical order and the contents make it easy to find sections of interest or relevance. The title means that people affected by cancer may not naturally reach for this book. This is a shame because it has many useful strategies for coping with the challenges of major illness, long-term or temporary. For some, cancer is a long-term condition, controlled for many years, many others are considered cured after treatment, a considerable number are left with long-term health issues. Much of the content is relevant to people in these situations, for example: the assumption of being cured and therefore back to 'normal' or having a terminal diagnosis; coping with changes in lifestyle that can come with major illness; and interactions with medics.

I like this book; it is written in an easy style and has comprehensive coverage of the challenges faced by those with long-term health conditions, and their carers, family, and friends. The strategies for coping with these challenges are presented in a simple, straightforward manner, which encourages you to try them. I had many moments of recognition, particularly regarding the comments and assumptions that people can make about ongoing ill health. The observations are non-judgemental, and the mindful practices are presented in a gentle, encouraging manner. It also gives equal consideration to the position of the carer and the challenges they face.

**Breast cancer, melanoma, and lymphoma survivor (46-44) (November 2016)**

This book is written by someone who lives with chronic illness and covers topics relevant to a range of people touched by illness, not just the patient. It is excellent for highlighting the emotional strain that illness can have upon the patient and their family and friends. It covers how to manage day-to-day issues whilst dealing with chronic pain and illness. I think it is particularly useful for those who have moved beyond treatment and are perhaps living with post or late effects. It covers a lot of the topics focused on in the HOPE programme, such as mindfulness, pacing, and communication with family members. It is an ideal book for relatives and friends of those living with or after cancer, as it gives an insight into how a patient feels and the support they might need.

The book flows very well. It covers a range of topics in an organised yet sensitive way, from the effects of illness on one's body and emotional state, to the effect and impact on loved ones. It is appealing to a wide audience and the language is straightforward and honest yet sensitive. The author is almost conversational; the content is open and friendly, the author speaking from her own experiences. The title and the content come across very positively. The cover is modern looking and bright, having been kept simple. The text is very well laid out. The chapters are clearly organised, and the text is divided by subheadings or highlighted questions, which makes accessing and navigating the book very easy.

This book is good at laying out what are the issues around chronic illness. It pays attention to how this can impact on every part of one's life, including relationships. It gives the reader the chance to think around the subject and question what steps they may take to help adapt to their new circumstances. It is a great book for those wishing to come to terms with illness and would be particularly useful for those suffering from late effects and long-term consequences of cancer treatment. It would have been an excellent recommendation on the HOPE programme booklist.

It would also be a great book for the family and friends in that it communicates how utterly exhausting it can be, how difficult it can be to talk to loved ones about how wretched one can feel, and how they can help in the adaptation and adjustment to this 'new you' after cancer and illness.

As a cancer patient living with late effects, I found this an incredibly enlightening and positive book. It is heartening to read that the issues I encounter in day-to-day life are not restricted to me and that they were dealt with in a searingly honest way, whilst being sensitive to the emotional strain this can put upon you. I also like how the author injected humour into her writing. It may be a painful and unpleasant situation at times, but the things people around you say and do can be found funny. This is a great book to enlighten and motivate someone living with chronic illness, great for those caring for a loved one with chronic illness who wants a deeper understanding of how it effects the patient, but also great for professionals who would be given an eye-opening 'inside view' of what it's really like to live with chronic illness.

**Living with the late effects of lymphoma (36-45) (July 2016)**

This is an easy, warm read for anyone. It is most useful for how to deal emotionally with the debilitating aspects of cancer when you are tired, in pain, or can't do things. It will help you to handle problems and people in a gracious way. Toni writes in an easy, flowing style covering just about every difficulty with sensitivity, humour and a mindful approach, especially when dealing with the crassness of others who have no understanding of long-term illness and pain. She has plenty of time too for family and carers, their needs, and concerns, often using her own family situation to highlight problems and solutions.

It is an attractive book with clear text. It is easy to work through; it flows beautifully, and Toni has a warm, intimate, and caring style. It is very easy to understand, there is nothing complicated or unclear. The short chapters are clearly headed, so you can dip in and out and head for the pages you think will be helpful today.

I like everything about this book! It's a book to have by your bedside or your chair, to dip into whenever you may be feeling low or not coping. Toni is an American living in a different culture, but this does not interfere with the wisdom she has to impart. She was a law professor for 20 years and for the past 14 has lived with a chronic and debilitating illness, so she knows what she's talking about. She is also a long-time Buddhist, but doesn't overplay this. I recommend it without question. You don't need to know about mindfulness or already use it in your life, it quickly becomes clear what she means and how you can use the approach she advocates to improve your life. In fact, it's a good demystifier of mindfulness. I'd recommend all hospital and self-help groups have a copy in their libraries. One of the best self-help books I've ever read.

### **Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (66-75) (July 2016)**

This is a very informative read. It gives a good understanding of the patient and their choices. We often forget what they are going through and try to push them to do things that we think are good for them. The author has had experience of chronic pain and it is very much like my own experience of pain. It helped me manage the pain and this is a good thing. It is an easy read, very engaging. The cover gives just the right feel to what the book is about. The paper quality is good, as is the typeface. The only illustration is a symbol – a flower – that gives a good feel to the way the chapters are set out.

The five stars show how much I value this book. I was going through a lot of pain for months before I read it and it gave me comfort, plus good advice, and signposting to services. It captures just the right tone and gives an accurate and honest appraisal of what happens to someone experiencing pain, and how to deal with it. I tried some of the suggestions and felt that they did work as currently I am experiencing chronic pain in my lower left side. It gave me a good idea of my own situation and helped me towards controlling the symptoms as well managing the pain effectively.

A very good read that I recommend to all. It is very useful for anyone with chronic pain, or a carer, to read and take comfort from. It is an honest assessment of what the author went through and as such needs to be taken on board by everyone.

### **Cancer survivor (bowel cancer and AML) (56-65) (June 2016)**

This is useful for anyone who has been disabled by illness of any kind. It offers insight into the emotions and psychology of living with chronic illness and/or pain but also has practical suggestions to help the patient and those around them who are affected by the changes and deprivations brought about by the illness. It can be read during any period where the patient has a significantly diminished lifestyle, e.g. when they are immobilised or bedridden.

It is a very accessible book. I got a lot of information that has a scientific basis without it being boring or overly technical. The author speaks from experience, which makes it authentic. She is extremely clear and repeats things only when appropriate. There are many practical tips on how to manage the impact of chronic illness. I have used mindfulness, but she has deepened my understanding of its techniques. The references to Buddhism and other ideas inspired me to do further research and I have bought a couple of the books mentioned. It is a visually appealing book, perhaps on the large size if reading in bed, but this means the print is a good readable size. The layout is excellent, and the subheadings make the book easy to follow. The title is misleading as the book does not address living with pain in detail.

I have discovered mindfulness in the past year. It has helped me manage physical and mental pain. This book has deepened my understanding of mindfulness and ways to use it. But the author also offers very sound advice on how to manage oneself during chronic illness. How important it is to find a way of accepting your situation and realise you can't change other people, but you can help them to respond to you in a way that is helpful rather than irritating or useless.

This authentic and well-written book is a manual for living well! It is not specifically for cancer patients but has a lot to offer as a self-help manual! Though the author has Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, much of it touched me as a cancer patient in remission and still suffering side-effects of long-term treatment. I was physically immobilised for lengthy periods during and after treatment and suffered depression when treatment ended. It has much to offer someone with the depression, low self-esteem and self-absorption that often ensue during and after long-term illness. She talks about doing what one can to understand and manage one's limits, but also find ways to help others – a crucial element to finding some meaning in a life deprived of so much.

**Breast cancer 2004, recurrence 2012, GIST 2014 (56-65) (June 2016)**

This is an excellent read for anyone with a chronic illness or anyone caring for them. The author writes from experience and is honest and compassionate. You will want to read it again and again to remind you that you're not alone. It also gives family and friends an insight into what the patient is going through. There is no glossary, but the author explains words in the text and everything is explained in detail. The text is a good size and clear to read. I recommend it – sometimes people just need reassuring that someone somewhere understands what they are going through.

**Several relatives with cancer (including non-Hodgkin lymphoma, bowel, lung, breast, prostate, stomach, saliva) (46-55) (May 2016)**

This book isn't specifically about cancer, but rather, about living with a long-term health condition, and therefore has the potential to be relevant and useful to a wide range of conditions.

The author gives some refreshingly candid insights into the reality of living with uncertain health and the challenges that this brings, and its impact on relationships. I found the sections on dealing with this to be particularly helpful and clear. She also gives a lot of useful tips about self-care, for people affected by cancer as well as carers. The sections on carers are very touching as it gives real insight into how cancer affects more than just the person who has it.

The book flows well and is a combination of personal experiences and reflections. It is easy to understand, with little technical medical language and the author writes in a very personable way; she manages to write from a very personal viewpoint and yet makes suggestions and observations that can easily be applied to the reader, whether they are the person who is living with ill health, or a carer.

I like the fact that the author is honest about how difficult it is to deal with explaining about your health to other people, and the tensions that this creates. There are some great concepts such as the "Want monster" (p. 36) as well as many references to Buddha's teachings and how these can be applied to health situations. There are thought-provoking quotes from a range of people, including one of my favourites: "Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." (Arthur Ashe, p. 45). While the author discusses some lofty ideals, such as developing equanimity, there are also practical suggestions to help achieve them.

Some of the issues raised are very helpful, such as whether we talk openly about our health, whether we take medication to have less pain but less clarity of thought, and whether we spend what little energy we on chores to maintain independence or use it on more fulfilling things. These clearly come from personal experience of living with a long-term health condition, rather than being simply theoretical. The Byron Katie technique (p. 97) – "four questions and a turnaround" – could have been expanded into a longer section by itself, to look at thought patterns and how we could change a negative thought into something more constructive. A great idea.

There is a lot of Buddhism; this is not a bad thing, but I haven't read any of her previous books so wasn't aware of her belief system. This does create a slightly limited feel to the book in that her approaches are generally built on Buddhist principles, but that is just something to be aware of. Perhaps a more realistic subtitle to the book would be "A mindful Buddhist's guide" rather than just "A mindful guide".

Whilst the book is about living with pain and illness rather than specifically cancer, it has lots of useful tips and insights into managing being ill, which would apply to anyone undergoing treatment or living with the long-term effects of cancer treatment.

**Living with stage 4 tonsil cancer (56-65) (May 2016)**

You can dip in and out of this book. It is broken down into chapters on different aspects of coping with chronic fatigue or pain as the author experienced and dealt with them. It offers many suggestions on how to deal with chronic illness and pain, for everyone affected. It is an honest account and written by someone who really understands the daily problems chronic fatigue and pain can cause. I found it easy to understand. The paper is of good quality and typeface just right. There are no illustrations, but I don't think they would add anything to the book.

Chronic pain and illness have profound effects on everyday life, for all those affected. This book offers helpful advice and suggestions that have better enabled me to see life through my son's eyes, who has battled fatigue and pain for four years. The author describes her experiences and how she has learned to cope, which may be useful to others in a similar situation. I think this book is invaluable to carers/relatives and friends of someone with chronic illness and pain, especially chapter 7.

### **My son has chronic myeloid leukaemia (66-75) (May 2016)**

This is a book for everyone, not just those with chronic pain and illness, but families, caregivers, and health professionals. In a compassionate and personal way, the author offers wonderful insight into how we can live well. The author writes as if she is a friend talking directly to you. The cover is bright, and the contents well laid out.

It is a descriptive book from one individual's perspective but that can be replicated by others, irrespective of status. It is a calming, informative read with sprinkles of humour throughout. The emphasis is on practical coping strategies and it draws you into a positive frame of mind. This book will remain on my bookshelf for many years to come! A must-read that can be dipped into repeatedly!

### **Health professional (46-55) (February 2016)**

This will be useful for anyone living with chronic illness and pain, including cancer patients and their loved ones, for dealing with the day-to-day experience of having cancer, living with constant pain, how to deal with it, and getting people to understand what you are going through and how they can help.

There is no glossary, but Toni explains technical words well. She writes from her experience in an understanding way and, despite the serious subject, uses humour to get across her story. I don't like the quotes from Buddhists and other famous people; many are hard to understand, and I question their relevance.

I particularly like how the author does not force her opinion on you but uses her experience as a guide. She bases everything on her own experience, which many people can relate to. The advice is not forced on you and consists of suggestions that people living with cancer may find useful. People do not really understand what we go through on a day-to-day basis, and often think that because we look well we are ok. I can relate to what she says, particularly about people not understanding what it is like to live with chronic illness and pain. As she suggests, many illnesses are invisible, and this book will help people understand them more.

This is an excellent book. Toni Bernhard is brave and inspirational. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it and will refer to it often when I need inspiration to deal with my day-to-day feelings, when things are getting me down and I need advice. I had not heard of the other books by Toni but hope to read them at some point.

### **Living with secondary breast cancer of the liver (46-55) (February 2016)**

Toni Bernhard wrote this book on a laptop in bed. A practising Buddhist and former law professor, she was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome in 2001 and has been living with its challenges since then. Cancer patients may not immediately identify with some of her problems, such as lack of understanding from others. Nevertheless, there is much relevant and helpful information and advice for cancer patients (and family and friends), especially anyone experiencing chronic issues associated with pain, physical limitations, and fatigue, not the medical aspects but daily living and general pacing of activities. The focus is helping people cope better and make peace with their lives despite the upheavals caused by chronic illness. Bernhard emphasises the cultivation of mindfulness, equanimity, and compassion, describing many exercises and practices, with examples from her experience.

Bernhard points out that "we live in a culture that repeatedly suggests that, with proper diet and lifestyle changes, no one need be sick, and no one need be in pain." She considers that the reason the chronically ill are often not treated as equals is because society does not prepare people for the inevitability that bodies get sick, old and injured. She observes that many of us are quick to judge others with fatigue. Those with chronic illness sometimes have to put up with well-meaning comments that totally miss the mark for example: "I get fatigued, too. I wish I could stay at home all day!" Even comments like "You look great! How could you be ill?" can be hurtful.

Bernhard is generous with her wisdom in this book. For example, it is tempting to be preoccupied with regret about the past or worry about the future. She suggests an exercise inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh that she calls "drop it." If you find yourself thinking negatively about the past or future, tell yourself to "drop it." But it does not stop there. As soon as you "drop it", she writes, you can immediately start to ground yourself in the present by paying attention to what you are currently seeing, hearing, feeling, and to whatever else is in your awareness. This simple exercise is powerful but does take practice for the best outcome. Other areas Bernhard explores include longing for the good old days, loneliness, issues faced by young people with chronic illness, complaining, embarrassment, dealing with the change in your identity, and setting limits. Thus, to-do lists are replaced with not-to-do lists. She gives extensive resources and guidance for carers too. She highlights being honest about how one feels, not only with carers and friends, but with oneself.

It is a substantial and attractively presented paperback with a tasteful cover. The tone is conversational, with no unexplained jargon, and you feel you are being addressed as a friend. Chapter headings give an indication of the wide range of topics covered. These include: Skills to help with daily living; Mindfulness; a valuable approach for easing the symptoms of chronic illness; Responding helpfully to troubling thoughts and emotions; Isolation and loneliness; Enjoying the life you have now; Information for family, friends, carers, and anyone concerned with chronic illness.



I like the candid way in which the author addresses her readers. She is generous with her thoughts and ideas. She has been a practising Buddhist for decades and her gentle approach reflects this. She describes the practice of mindfulness thoroughly. She makes no pretensions of being perfect and has a chapter dedicated to dealing positively with being in a bad mood and what she misses about her life before illness. There is no doubt, Bernhard writes, that there will be times when one feels blue and when one longs for the past life, free of pain. She gives practical suggestions on how to use mindfulness and other techniques to bring oneself back to being fully present. She writes, "Although, I couldn't force my body to get better, I could heal my mind".

For a reader with cancer, some of the first part of the book focuses on the concerns of someone with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and the misunderstandings that arise from having this invisible condition; this may not resonate personally with the experiences of cancer. However, there is useful information about dealing with general fatigue, and adjusting to doing fewer physical activities. The last two thirds of the book are more helpful, in practical terms, for the person with cancer.

Unfortunately, last year, Bernhard was diagnosed with breast cancer. She has since been undergoing treatment. The prognosis is good, she states. Interestingly, she adds that the work she has done to address her Chronic Fatigue Syndrome has prepared her for cancer. This includes the caring attention that mindfulness asks of us, with compassion for herself and others and a sense of calm acceptance beneath the mental and physical suffering. She finishes the book with, "May we all find the place of peace within the turbulence of life."

I enjoyed reading this book more than I thought I would from the first few pages. The author has a gentle sense of humour that permeates even the darker aspects of her experiences. This book is very helpful for those who wish to explore the huge benefits of mindfulness in everyday life, and particularly mindfulness meditation.

**Friend of cancer patient and former health professional (56-65) (January 2016)**



Written in a warm and compassionate style, this is a comprehensive book, covering everything from the difficulties of negotiating household chores, medical appointments and social obligations while living with chronic pain or illness, to the need for the caregivers of those with chronic pain and illness to develop greater self-compassion. The book caters to a wide audience, and many readers will find the author's strategies for dealing with chronic pain and illness helpful. It's the type of book that readers will find themselves returning to repeatedly.

It flows well, and you get to know the author and how she strives to live well with chronic pain and illness as you progress through the chapters. It is very easy to understand, and the author's voice is comforting and compassionate; I felt she was speaking to me directly. The typeface is an adequate size and the paper quality is good. There are no illustrations and the cover could be more appealing.

The author shows genuine care and empathy towards her readers. She shares her struggles and setbacks with unflinching honesty and offers inspirational quotes and Buddhist exercises to help them cope with the challenges of living with chronic pain and illness.

### **Relative of someone with breast and lung cancer (26-35) (June 2016)**

Although this book is about chronic illness, it is still relevant to cancer patients and others such as carers, relatives, and friends. It is about attitude to your health and making life easier for someone with a chronic illness. The most useful aspect for those with cancer is about accepting what is wrong with you and learning to live with your health problems. The author has had to adjust her life to feel more comfortable with it, try to prevent her problems worsening, and come to terms with her illness. Accepting you have cancer can help you deal with problems that occur. The author describes her problems in detail and how she dealt with them and her experience – for example adopting a positive attitude – can apply to anyone with a serious health issue. The effectiveness of her ideas for dealing with pain can help the reader realise that they are not alone and thus not feel so isolated.

It is well written, easy to understand and flows nicely. It is thorough and organised, straightforward and to the point and explains things very well. Everyone who reads it will find something to relate to, or experience something similar. Some may find it too detailed and some information may not be necessary, but she has a lot to say and it is in any case an interesting read. The language is appropriate for most of us; I don't think I checked any words in the dictionary.

It looks quite ordinary; it doesn't jump out at you. The paper quality is good, and it is easy to turn the pages. The typeface is easy to read; some may find it a little on the small side, but I didn't have a problem with it. There are no illustrations but there are interesting quotes from various people. The tone comes across as funny, but she is serious too and I get the impression that she is determined to get across her ideas. Nothing comes across as gloomy despite the seriousness of the topic.

I like everything about this book. It's detailed and explains everything, including her thoughts; she is basically thinking aloud, even, for example, about bladder conditions or untidiness, it's quite entertaining. It is almost as if she doesn't want to miss anything out. There is perhaps too much information but overall, it is enjoyable to read despite its title! It could be quite useful as it can offer emotional support as well as some useful information, but it is more what the author has to offer rather than information. Although it is not a book about cancer, I would still recommend it to people I think would benefit from it. Definitely worth a read.

### **I have a close friend with bowel cancer (56-65) (May 2016)**

Although not specifically about cancer (the author has CFS), this book has a lot of useful mindfulness practices and tips for anyone with a chronic condition or pain. It would be useful for carers and friends as an insight into what life is like for people living with illness and how they can be helped and supported. It also looks at the carer's viewpoint and how illness in a loved one can affect those who support them.

It covers how to deal with the sense of grief and loss associated with serious illness, how to deal with anxiety, uncontrolled thoughts about how life used to be and how it may be. It recommends mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, and mental approaches to coping with some of these difficulties. There is also a useful chapter on dealing with health professionals and getting the most out of appointments.

The book is very readable; there is no difficult technical language, topics are divided clearly into chapters, and chapters are short and arranged under subheadings, which means that you can dip in and out and think about the material before moving on to the next chapter. It is very easy to understand. Although it draws on Buddhist and mindfulness teachings, these are simply explained and easy to follow. It is a book for the public – no specialist knowledge needed. It is large paperback but not too heavy to hold comfortably. The typeface is comfortable to read, and the layout is good. The author's tone is conversational, and she includes personal anecdotes to illustrate her points, she has a very readable style. There are no illustrations or photographs, but each chapter starts with a relevant and inspiring quotation from various authors.

I like the fact that it has simple practical advice that you can use immediately. It is clearly and practically set out, so you can easily find segments you want to re-read. Although it does refer to Buddhist practices, specifically mindfulness, it is not religious, referring to things like mindfulness, breathing techniques, meditation, from a purely practical point of view. I like the fact that it doesn't talk about 'positive thinking' but deals with how to cope with feelings of despondency, resentment, grief, and anger in practical ways, rather than berating yourself for feeling them.

The author writes from her experience, so some of the physical limitations she experiences are specific to her. Some people might find that a little off putting, but she does say that everyone's illness is different and everyone's experience (even of the same illness) is different. I wouldn't say that I dislike this – her experiences overlapped with mine even though we have very different diseases – but others might find it less relevant depending on their cancer or treatment. However, there is enough general practical advice for everyone to find something relevant to them.

I found it very useful in a general way about how to cope with the difficulties of living with cancer. I have done the HOPE course and this book would tie in well with many of the issues discussed. I recommend it to anyone living with cancer as a chronic condition or living with the after effects of treatment, who is coming to terms with the changes in their life and any restrictions they must deal with. It is not particularly useful for someone whose cancer is progressing rapidly and who is dealing with changing treatments and a deteriorating condition. It is more about dealing with long-term issues of pain and fatigue and changes in relationships with others.

This is a book about dealing with what life has thrown at you in the best way you can for your own wellbeing and happiness. It covers how to deal with ignorance and lack

of understanding from others, how to cope with thoughtless comments and how to get the most out dealings with health professionals. It faces the difficulties of chronic illness squarely and doesn't deny the restrictions, disappointments, and frustrations it can impose. I found this approach refreshing. I like the 'this isn't much fun but these of some ways of coping' approach. It gives you permission to feel bad, frustrated, angry, and resentful, then tells you how to get past these feelings by acknowledging them and breaking them down so you can understand where they are coming from. It is a practical and sensible book; it doesn't claim that living with illness is easy, or that you can 'think positively' and you will be OK. The opposite in fact, it acknowledges the bad things and gives you some strategies, without making you feel that negative thoughts are abnormal or bad. But it's not a negative book, it left me feeling optimistic and empowered to regain some control over the way my illness makes me think and feel. It is nonjudgmental and very helpful and I enjoyed reading it.

### **Breast cancer patient (56-65) (May 2016)**

This is most useful for someone who has ongoing side-effects of cancer treatment, but not someone with incurable cancer. It would also not be particularly useful for someone who felt well during treatment and did not have any lasting side effects.

It has a good structure with short, manageable chapters grouped into themed sections. The chapters are further divided using subheadings and the text is clear and easy to read, good for someone who is feeling tired and unable to read much at once. There is no technical language and the text is clear and well explained. The language is suitable for an adult audience and the author has a friendly and conspiratorial tone. The cover design is tasteful and the paper good quality. There are no illustrations or photographs.

I really like how well the author has broken down the topics, so that I could read small sections at a time. There are lots of practical techniques that may be useful during or after treatment. I had already been using many of these, though I didn't know that they were 'techniques'. They are good ways to cope with the frustrations of a chronic illness. She addresses many of the challenges people face, in a kind and supportive way. She does not encourage self-pity, but an attitude of kindness towards oneself. At times, I felt she was a little self-centred and encouraged readers to be too. When she talks about friends and family not providing the support she needed, she shows little consideration for the fact that they may be experiencing their own challenges.

I enjoyed it and will recommend it to others in a similar position; it will depend on the stage of their cancer and whether they were left unwell after treatment. I don't think it is useful for someone with terminal cancer. In the Afterword, the author mentions that she was diagnosed with breast cancer shortly after writing the book. However, it is based on her experience with post viral fatigue syndrome. This is an unpleasant illness, but many of the anxieties are different to those caused by cancer, e.g. anxiety that a scan will show recurrence or disease progression.

### **Recovering from bowel cancer treatment (Under 25) (April 2016)**

This is an excellent resource to support those living with chronic illness or cancer, focusing on the life adjustments that many people make and the emotional aspects of living with cancer, chronic illness, or chronic pain. I like the sections on special challenges, isolation and loneliness and the focus on enjoying life. Anyone could read it but is most useful for those personally affected, to help them live well, with a focus on the emotional aspects of living with cancer and chronic pain, the importance of self compassion and ways of adjusting to how you are now.

There is a logical order to the book: a simple practical introduction followed by further chapters on specific topics in more detail and for specific audiences. It is easy to understand, and the language is simple. It is an appealing book, in tone, language, simplicity, and practical information.

The more I read the more I wanted to read, especially as I already have an interest in mindfulness for health and wellbeing. It is an excellent reminder of these principles and a practical book that encouraged me to read more. The key messages ring true in so many ways with my experience of living with secondary breast cancer and my experience in so many ways compares with living with any chronic illness or chronic pain daily. Occasionally, there is too much detail about her experience.

It is a good book to have at hand to refer to repeatedly as a reminder of how it is possible to live well with cancer and/or chronic illness or pain. It is an excellent resource to help day by day and to support oneself to find self compassion and equanimity with the experience of chronic illness and/or cancer. The quote 'if you change your mind you can change your life' is so true. I recommend every Macmillan Information and Support Centre stock this book.

### **Living with secondary breast cancer (46-55) (March 2016)**

This is a practical, honest, and supportive guide to self help through mindfulness. For those interested in this approach, it will be an invaluable guide for patients or the carers or loved ones of anyone dealing with the upheaval, turmoil, and difficulties of cancer. It gives you mindfulness strategies whether you are in the midst of cancer or dealing with its consequences. As the introduction says, it helps you deal with and 'make sense of a life turned upside down'. It helps deal with pain, loneliness, isolation, and the practical and emotional effects of cancer.

It starts with mindfulness skills to help on a daily basis and then addresses particular, and specific, difficulties. Finally, there is a section for carers, friends, and caregivers. I like how each chapter starts with a meaningful, relevant quote from a well-known person. I like the nature of the book, basically a self-help, step-by-step guide. With cancer, ultimately, you need to make peace with yourself and any difficulties you have, which are often outside your control; this book helps you to make friends with your body and not to regard it as the enemy.

It is well written using clear, non-technical language. The author, herself chronically ill, writes with heartfelt honesty and empathy. She really reaches out to her audience with her compassionate approach but in a caring, insightful, practical way. It is an

attractive book and its cover reflects its mindful approach. The chapters are short and the index clear, so you can dip in easily for advice and support as and when needed.

If you are interested in the idea of mindfulness, this will be an invaluable self-help guide. However, if it is new to you, I suggest that you read up about it before buying this book. In short, mindfulness is the practice of turning your attention, with care, to your experience of the moment; it helps you calm and steady your mind giving you breathing room to reflect and respond to a stressful situations, feelings, and emotions. It's all about developing self-compassion. Cancer is overwhelming and all consuming and mindfulness helps you deal with it one step and one day at a time. If this appeals to you then this will be a very useful book; if not, it probably isn't for you.

### **Bowel cancer patient (56-65) (January 2016)**



This is a very easy, accessible read. It is most useful for coping, not necessarily with physical pain, but certainly with the mental issues that accompany chronic pain and illness. It is a very honest book written by a chronic pain sufferer who also understands the difficulties encountered by carers, friends, and family.

It is a clear, well-presented book with a clear typeface. The chapters and sections are well set out. Each chapter covers a different aspect but links well to the next. Part of it is in a question and answer format, which may form a handy reference guide. Each chapter opens with an inspirational quote.

This is an easy, positive, and honest approach to chronic pain and illness, definitely a book for general interest and emotional support. It is not a technical book in any way; it is a personal account of illness and coping strategies. However, it does not cover the psychological principle of mindfulness in the way I perhaps expected, not that it is necessarily a bad thing. It gives a clear voice to many feelings and emotions and support through them. Perhaps the title is a little misleading. 'Living well' with pain and illness may suggest a structured plan, for example nutrition or lifestyle, but it is not that at all. Someone in the throes of severe chronic pain may find the 'easiness' of the book a little glib. It is also a little 'New Age' in parts so may not appeal to all.

### **Carer (46-55) (June 2016)**



I found nothing helpful in this book to ease living with chronic pain, as I must every day. It may be useful for the side effects and long-term problems of treatment, but it is not a great help to someone with cancer. It is more about the author's life.

It does not flow and is relatively difficult to read – assuming the reader has knowledge that is possibly beyond the needs of many people – and has a fair amount of repetition. The title is misleading; it should be “How I live with...”.

I would not recommend it as a guide to coping with chronic pain; it is written in too much depth and in the first person and does not have a connection to problems caused by cancer. There is also too much about how the author manages with her partner; it assumes that the reader has help or a partner. There may be a few ideas on pain management if you search.

**I was misdiagnosed for four years before ovarian cancer was diagnosed after surgery to remove an ovarian cyst (resulting in removal of 7lb- and 14lb-cysts, also a radical hysterectomy without consent). I was given five months to live, with an absolute maximum of five years. This was in 1993! (56-65) (June 2016)**

This does not refer directly to cancer, but it could be used for cancer pain, although there may be other books that address it in a more direct manner. It could be used if someone is experiencing anxiety.

The author writes in a personal but logical manner. I didn't notice any errors, but she writes from her perspective and focuses on her thoughts and beliefs. It is easy to understand, with no technical words. There are occasional mentions of bodily functions, but they are easy to understand. The paper is off white; books look better with white pages, but this is not a problem. The font size is fine. As it is a personal book, the author has included a summary of her illness and her religious beliefs, which link in to the practice of mindfulness. She comes across as friendly but writes only short paragraphs about her thoughts and feelings with little depth or detail.

I like that anyone with chronic pain can use this book and that it lets you know that you are not the only person experiencing pain and having thoughts and fears. I don't like that it doesn't really specialise in cancer as the cause of chronic pain. The author is not a health care professional, which possibly explains why there are no technical references within the book. She refers to her religious beliefs in connection with the mindfulness that she practices, and this may put off some readers.

It is a nice book on its own merits but not good enough for cancer patients. Some people may be helped by the author's ideas, which may provide emotional support and self-help technique, but I would rather anyone with cancer had access to a specialised, factual book relating to their issue.

**Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (June 2016)**

The author suffered from chronic pain and illness after falling ill with an acute viral infection in 2001. She is a practicing Buddhist and lives with her husband in southern California. Her book is aimed at anyone managing chronic illness and pain and supports a mindful approach.

It is very easy to understand, and the content is well presented with a good flow. It is also good to 'dip into' as each section is divided into sub sections, so you can read as much or as little as you want in a sitting.

I really wish that I could have liked this book more but for me, reading it in the hope that I could identify tools or techniques to make my mother's chronic pain easier to bear, California seems a different world. It is of course easy to stereotype but much of the practical information, such as the range of health cover offerings and choosing a doctor, is simply not relevant or applicable outside of America. This is not to say that there aren't some hidden gems. The real jewel is the realisation that the physical discomfort that accompanies pain and illness is made up of three components, only one of which is physical. The other two, stressful emotions and stressful thought patterns, are mental and how we respond makes all the difference.

In summary, this is a book about paying attention to what is present in your environment, in other words being mindful. It is written from the heart, but it is not specific to cancer and will have only limited appeal.

#### **Macmillan Cancer Centre Volunteer (56-65) (April 2016)**

This may be of use for someone with long-term and debilitating chronic pain, possibly resulting from cancer treatment, but in many cases, it would not be suitable for cancer patients and its use should be recommended only with caution. The author has a painful, but not terminal, condition. Much of the book is based on aspects of dealing with family and friends and how to maximise benefit from the support structure they provide. Someone isolated could become demoralized and depressed. The author is from the USA and obviously has considerable financial resources; she freely discusses alternative and expensive treatments not commonly available on the NHS and comments about their health care system are generally not relevant here.

The contents are logical, and it flows well and is easy to understand (there are a few typographical errors). It is generally appealing in terms of its physical appearance and quality. The author comes across as pleasant and caring, though does tend to dwell on her own condition (CFS). Parts of the book are provocative in a positive way. It attempts to provide alternative ways of dealing with chronic pain and its associated psychological aspects; some it makes good sense.

It is a well-written book; for some it would provide an interesting and useful read. For others, it would rub salt in their wounds. It may cause distress to people living in isolation. It is limited in use to broad-minded individuals, maybe with a professional background and some disposable finance. It should be recommended with care, and only if a person's situation is deemed appropriate.

#### **Family member with previous caring responsibilities (46-55) (March 2016)**



I recognise many of the symptoms and could relate to the problems covered but I had to struggle to get through this book. It seems appealing at the start, but some chapters are depressing. I was there with her in her situation but felt I was reading about a superhuman. By the end of each chapter, she seems incredibly smug about how she dealt with the situation, whereas the reader is left feeling 'I could never do that'. She could rearrange so many things; there just seems no way that anyone would go on at such length to family members or friends. Perhaps I feel like this because we tend to medicate to control pain, put on a brave face and participate in what is happening.

It may be useful for someone who is seeking a way to explain, and find ways of dealing with, the effects of their cancer on everyday living.

**Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (66-75) (March 2016)**

## Further information

### Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

### Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

### Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

**Being told ‘you have cancer’ can affect so much more than your health – it can also affect your family, your job, even your ability to pay the bills. But you’re still you. We get that. And, after over 100 years of helping people through cancer, we get what’s most important: that you’re treated as a person, not just a patient.**

**It’s why we’ll take the time to understand you and all that matters to you, so we can help you get the support you need to take care of your health, protect your personal relationships and deal with money and work worries.**

**We’re here to help you find your best way through from the moment of diagnosis, so you’re able to 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](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

**© Macmillan Cancer Support, October 2018**

**Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SCO39907) and the Isle of Man (604).**