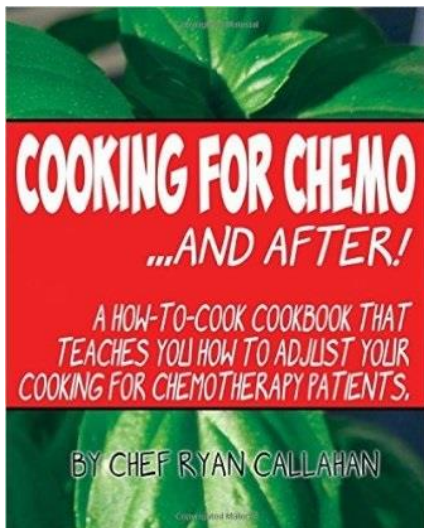


**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**

# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**Cooking for chemo...and after!**  
A how-to-cook cookbook that teaches you how to adjust your cooking for chemotherapy patients (2015)

Callahan R.

USA: Callahan Publishing, 2015.

244pp.

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£15.95.

**Average star rating 3.1 (out of 5)**

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This is best used as soon as the patient has agreed to chemotherapy; having a cookbook will help them to prepare and feel prepared and to discover their favourite dishes, some/most of which can be made ahead of time and frozen.

Most of the recipes are aimed at beginners so are easy to follow. Most ingredients can be classified as staples and are not too expensive. The main dishes are mainly meat-based (meat can be expensive, especially the recommended organic so some people may choose to have meat one to three times a week) due to the complete amino acid profile of animal protein necessary for rebuilding and repairing cells; vegetarians and vegans will adapt and substitute where they wish to do so.

There is nothing too technical or difficult to understand. The table of contents spells everything out in lieu of a glossary or index. The language is informal and friendly. There are small typos throughout but they do not detract from comprehension and are not in the recipes themselves. I would prefer the order of chapters 2 and 3 swapped, so that chapter 3 could be read first and items bought before continuing.

The typeface is rather quirky and won't be to everyone's taste – it takes some getting used to. The font size is good for reading from the book while preparing the recipes and the paper type and size of the book suggest a book that you won't mind getting sauce stains on – it feels like a book that is meant to be used often.

I like that the chef took the time to suggest what the emotional reaction may be to a given recipe and that he thought of 'mouth feel' for chemo patients dealing with the frequent side effect of mouth sores. He also gives ingredient tips for counteracting the side effect of everything tasting metallic. He peppered the book with mostly easy to make recipes, with a few moderate and difficult ones included for the more experienced cook. I like his chart on spices and herbs and building on flavours in a particular order, proper sterilisation and sanitary considerations for people with lowered immunity, recommended equipment and proper food storage to avoid cross-contamination and food poisoning; and the importance of appealing to all the senses to encourage appetite in people undergoing chemo.

I am surprised that he doesn't include more ginger in recipes since it helps combat nausea. For non-US readers, the ounces and cup measurements need to be converted, though it's not too hard to do with an online resource or the purchase of an ounces measuring jug. He also uses MSG liberally, which I don't agree with. I understand why he does so and he does acknowledge the controversy of this ingredient and explains what it is derived from. He also mentions other ways to enhance savouriness, so omitting MSG is of no great consequence. One final point is that he could have included more recipes for those unfortunate enough to have severe side effects from chemotherapy.

### **Invasive lobular carcinoma at dx; now IDCDCIS post-mastectomy (46-55) (April 2016)**

This is a refreshing look at the impact of treatment on the sense of taste and what one chef has discovered can be helpful to encourage people to eat more during treatment. It is a great book for someone about to start treatment, whether a patient or the person who will be preparing meals. Having said that, I'm two years from the end of primary treatment and found it interesting to read what the author says about where different taste buds are in the mouth; this has made me think more about the taste of food rather than the texture. It's given me valuable insight into some of the science behind the changes to how my food tastes since treatment.

It is easy to understand, doesn't assume any prior knowledge or interest, and is realistic about the amount of skill required to deliver each dish. The section on taste is particularly interesting, although the idea of tasting things like vinegar as a way of documenting how my taste has changed is unappealing. The most obvious issue is that it is based on American tastes and ingredients. He makes no secret of his use of readymade ingredients (canned soup, gravy powder, frozen meat and vegetables) and explains that he's trying to get us to focus on the taste not the method.

The use of capitals throughout makes it look funky, current, and different to a mainstream cookery book, so it certainly stands out! However, it does make it harder to read and some numbers in the recipes are not clear; the numbers 1 and 7 aren't easy to distinguish but this is a minor point. The paper is good quality and the book has a nice feel to it; it's large enough to be solid but not too heavy. I would like to see photos of the recipes, especially as some ingredients are not readily available here.

The author applied his professional training to encourage his mother to eat during her cancer treatment, and this gives the book a very personal feel. He has a chatty and quite sarcastic style, which I like. The focus is on what you can vary in recipes to appeal to different senses of taste and how these can be affected by treatment, so it's not just a simple cookery book with recipes for ease of chewing or swallowing. It's more targeted and tries to inspire confidence in the reader to tweak recipes to suit the changed palate. His recipes are clear and easy to follow. It's like he's talking you through it looking over your shoulder. The decision to use all capitals does make a hard read, but otherwise a great effort.

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



The author is the son of a cancer patient so this book is his perception on cooking for his mother, but it would be good for a patient to read as well. It will be most useful during treatment and after. I don't think it will be much use for people before diagnosis as you don't know how, or if, the treatment will change your tastes.

The recipes are easy to follow and many ingredients are store-cupboard essentials. Also, for a lot of the recipes, the same ingredients can be used but just at different amounts. There are a variety of recipes to try and they aren't obscure.

The language is easy to understand, informal and very conversational. The author says that the book started as notes down in a notebook and that comes across. I quite enjoyed reading it in this way. There are 'quick notes' pages at the end of the chapters that serve as quick references should you need to go back. The table of contents at the beginning is comprehensive and the cheat sheets and quick notes are very helpful – you don't have to re-read the whole section to find what you need.

I was expecting a hardback but it is a paperback and I found it a bit annoying to use as I continually had to turn the pages. There are no pictures; this isn't necessarily a bad thing, but usually cookbooks show you the finished dish. The font really lets it down. It is all in upper case and the same size and style and difficult to read; it does resemble jottings in a notebook.

Clearly a lot of research has gone into this book and it has been well thought out. It teaches valuable lessons to help with cooking for patients so they can continue to eat the foods they like as far as possible. The variety of recipes is a good selling point. The layout is a real disappointment and I hope people aren't put off as they would miss out on a good book that has a lot of help and advice. I will definitely recommend it but would advise the reader to stick with it and not be disheartened by the text.

### **Living with Hodgkin lymphoma (26-35) (April 2016)**

As the title states, this book is designed for those who cook for chemotherapy patients during and and after chemo. Its objective is very clearly set from the very beginning. The introduction is warm and engaging.

English is not my mother tongue but I found it easy to understand. The language is appropriate for the intended audience and whenever I needed to go back to look up something, I did not have problem finding the information. The recipes are easy to follow and the ingredients are readily available from the supermarket. The cost will vary as it will depend on the brand and whether one wishes to buy organic. Because it is American, the author uses lbs, oz, cups, and Fahrenheit. It would be helpful to state the exact size of the cup to avoid doubt and confusion and it would be good to include metric measurements as well; readers using metric will need to convert.

Perhaps to keep the cost down, there are no photos of any ingredients, spices, herbs or finished dishes. This may be fine for those who cook often but it would be

beneficial to include photos for at least some of the finished dishes to provide guidance and reassurance for those who are relatively new to cooking. The general layout is basic so I guess it's to keep the cost low for production. All in all, there is definitely room for improvement in the design and layout.

The book really highlights the importance of making tasty food for patients going through or recovering from chemotherapy due to the change in their taste buds and other side effects. The objective is clear and precise. However, at times, the author is repetitive in his explanation and I am concerned about some of the ingredients used, for example MSG and sugar. I also found the upper-case font distracting and heavy going. I wonder about the author's decision to do this.

It is a great book to highlight the importance of making delicious food for cancer patients but I wish it covered the nutritional side of the dishes more.

### **Relative of lymphoma patient (56-65) (April 2016)**

This book is suitable for family, friends, and carers of cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. As patients undergo chemotherapy their physical and sensory perception of food changes. It would also be great for anyone who is conscious about their health because it helps us to understand how certain food can affect your health, so it's not only useful for those with cancer.

I found it really easy to understand because simple words are used. Moreover, I really like how the author explains why he includes each ingredient, for example: "butter adds weight to the dish, savouriness, and serves to bond the flour for thickening". The clarity is enhanced by individual headings for the ingredients, flavour balancers, and aromatics. This enables the cook to understand the purpose of, and reason for, each ingredient.

The recipes are quite easy to follow and they are also graded according to the cooking skills required (beginner, moderate, advanced). Some photos of the finished dishes would make it more interesting. However, the font is quite nice because it makes you feel as if you are reading a magazine rather than something very intense.

I enjoyed it because I felt like I learned so much from it. Explanations are given for each ingredient added, which is very interesting because we generally cook without knowing the reaction of the ingredients. Moreover, this is not just simply a normal recipe books, it explains fundamental cooking knowledge.

I would really recommend this book to the patient's family, friends, and carer; understanding what the patient is going through is important, but providing food that they can enjoy whilst having chemotherapy is something that will surely make a difference to their experience. Moreover, the book provides skills that can be adapted and applied to other recipes that the reader wants to create; this is because the author provides the building blocks and basic understanding.

### **Medical student (Under 25) (March 2016)**



This is written for carers, family and friends of people with cancer who are having chemotherapy and the author directs the information and advice specifically to someone who is caring and cooking for a relative or friend at home. The author is a professional chef with experience of cooking for his mother when she lost her enjoyment of eating during and after chemotherapy. He acknowledges that the physical and sensory perception of food can change as a result of chemotherapy.

His approach to cooking and eating come from his assertion that there is nothing like some good comfort food when you are sad and scared and that life is not worth living without the benefit of eating well. He adds that 'cooking for people with treatment side-effects is like cooking for the pickiest and brattiest four-year-old ever.' Some readers may find that disrespectful. But it is not helpful to be put off. He is a plain speaker, and pulls no punches. He reminds the reader that chemo patients have a heightened sense of smell and taste on certain items (bitter/sour) and a diminished sense on others (sweet/sugar). Texture is very important if mouth sores begin to form. In a nutshell, his approach involves enhancing the aromatic qualities of food, producing roundness of flavour, and increasing sweetness and savoury aspects of the taste. There is also the palate-cleansing feature of vinegars, which remove that metallic taste in the mouth that many people experience during and after chemo. Blending herbs and spices can enhance the flavour of the meal.

The recipes cover main dishes, side dishes, breakfast, snacks, soups and smoothies. The author states that it is not the recipes that will help the reader, but the theory of how to flavour food properly and his recipes are not of the fine-dining type, they are home cooking favourites. The author is American and uses American terminology such as cups and sticks of butter. The names of some ingredients are also American vis. zucchini (courgettes) and eggplants (aubergines). Despite this, it is possible to make adjustments to UK ingredients, or just omit certain items if necessary. They are not the sorts of recipes that demand exact quantities, so the reader can adjust them.

It is a substantial paperback. The most unusual thing about its appearance is that all the text is in upper case. At first, I thought this made the words easy on the eye, but the lack of contrast results in a sort of visual monotony and it becomes easy to lose your place. Surprisingly for a recipe book, there are no pictures at all. This would have been good aesthetically, although the recipes are fairly standard and do not require much imagination to visualise what they look like. Pictures would help, however, not least because the person for whom the carer is cooking could be shown the photo of the meal and this would hopefully have a good effect on the appetite.

There is no doubt that the author is a very caring and meticulous person. He has adapted his knowledge of being a chef to the needs of his mother, for whom he was cooking when she lost her pleasure of eating following chemotherapy. He has an interesting approach that is different from the authors of other cook-books. He makes it clear that he is a chef, and not a nutritionist. There could be some statements that are contentious regarding nutrition, but I am not qualified to say.

I like his approach to flavour (and smell, texture, sound) of food as being paramount but I dislike his use of foods that are clearly 'bad' for you, (viz. fatty bacon, canned soups, added sugar etc.) and where people who have chemotherapy should have food of a high nutritional quality, I think this is a big drawback. He does state straight away that he takes shortcuts – canned soups, frozen vegetables, instant gravy – and urges readers to go ahead with healthier versions if they so wish but he could have used his approach to cooking with healthier ingredients.

This is a ground-breaking book in terms of what it sets out to achieve; ie acknowledgement of and attention to flavour enhancement and the senses of touch (texture) and smell. I consider it a shame that the author did not choose more healthy ingredients and acknowledge that this is highly important. People do need good nutrition as well as comfort when they are having chemotherapy. Also, perhaps he could have suggested that some patients would like to cook for themselves and others, and that this could be a part of his approach of stimulating the senses.

### **Former health professional, friend, carer (56-65) (April 2016)**

This is most suitable for a carer and best used during chemotherapy. The recipes are interesting but not everyday cooking and some ingredients are not readily available. It is more suited to the US market. I would not recommend it for daily use, although it is informative about spices. I do not have a carer and I would not have been able to cope with this on my own during chemotherapy. The print is not easy to read.

### **Living with lung cancer (Over 75) (April 2016)**

This is best read and used by a carer but it may help the patient to know what changes to expect.

It is very easy to understand and Chapters 1 and 2 are very informative, explaining the changes to taste and smell that may result from chemotherapy. However, it is American and the recipes are not easy to follow. Measurements are not given, e.g. 1 C. Cilantro, nor are conversions to gas or centigrade temperatures. Many ingredients are either not available in this country or I don't recognise them and the recipes are very American, e.g. pot roast or corn casserole. They do include a shepherd's pie but using beef! I watch a lot of cooking shows, many of which are American, so I do have some knowledge of their cuisine but a lot of British people will not.

The cover looks amateurish and homemade. The font is not attractive and the text is huge. You can easily lose your place. The lack of photographs is the worst thing about it. I do, however, think the author's tone is excellent and he is trying to impart the knowledge he gained when nursing his mother.

It is useful regarding changes to taste but not useful as to the recipes. I would recommend it just for Chapters 1 and 2.

### **Carer (pancreatic cancer) (46-55) (March 2016)**

This book aims to give cooking suggestions to friends, relatives, and carers of someone having chemotherapy but may also be useful for the patient and health professionals. It is most helpful during chemotherapy to provide help with, and suggestions for, recipes to tempt poor appetite.

It is a bright and bold book all in upper case. The author's tone is casual and familiar and I found it endearing. He refers frequently to his Mom and how she reacted to his recipes. The recipes are basic and easy, the main idea being to add flavourings to enhance the taste, smell and feel of food. However, they do use prime ingredients that could be expensive. It is very American in style, with measurements like cup of flour or stick of butter, and ingredients I don't know. There are no recipe photos.

The basic idea of using herbs, spices and flavourings to make dishes more appealing to those with poor appetites is useful but I found the descriptions of the fundamentals of flavour, weight and balancing a bit confusing.

### **Breast cancer survivor (66-75) (March 2016)**



Any user of this cookery book needs to be an accomplished cook. I found it easy to follow but I've been cooking professionally for 35 years; it's not easy for your average person. There are too many long-winded and time consuming recipes. After chemotherapy, I could only be bothered to cook for less than thirty minutes at a time. So, although good, it's too complex for someone chemo. It is also very American.

### **Living with small bowel and lymph node cancer (46-55) (April 2016)**

The general layout and wording are good but the cover is disappointing and there are no pictures or photographs. Many of the recipes are not easy to understand but are categorised according to difficulty (beginner, moderate and advanced). Spices are explained but some ingredients may be hard to find and could well be expensive.

At the beginning, the author explains about kitchen hygiene – this is just common sense – and how different foods should taste and their texture – this reads almost as if written for children. There is a big list of equipment and utensils. Most people do not need this and are not able to buy extra equipment. He does say if you don't have the equipment you can use something else but, again, that's common sense. The recipes have long lists of ingredients. People have enough to do all the time. Many patients are sick all the time, because of the cancer or the treatment, and this type of food is the last thing they need. They need plain, simple food.

It may be useful but it depends on cancer type. My husband has oesophageal cancer and swallowing even very soft food is difficult, food keeps coming back up. Also, the recipes are very rich and too spicy.

### **Caring for my husband who has oesophageal cancer (56-65) (March 2016)**



The author clearly states that this book is written for carers but I think that the audience could be wider. It is easy to understand and the tone is accessible, conversational and with a touch of humour. The initial chapter on “Understanding Flavor” is quite helpful and there are some useful charts showing the flavour and function of herbs and spices when added to a dish. The categorisation of recipes using a ranking of ease of preparation is clear and the last chapter on Smoothies contains some interesting recipes.

However, I am afraid that I found more to dislike than like. The prevalence of Americanisms and American spellings detract from the book’s good points. All the weights are given in cups, which makes it more difficult for a UK reader to follow. Some ingredients are given their US name (e.g. cilantro for coriander) and the author uses US terminology (e.g. broil) and ingredients (e.g. pot roast, turkey bacon). The instructions are easy to follow and the ‘chef’s tip’ at the end of the recipe is sometimes useful, at others the US-bias shows (e.g. “If you live in the Saint Louis area...”). It is not suitable for vegetarians as a high number of recipes use meat; those that don’t are mainly side dishes.

The cover looks quite cheap in graphics and style and the paper isn’t great quality as you can see the next page through it. The typeface is dense, all in upper case, which is not very easy on the eye and somewhat difficult to read. There are no photographs or illustrations to help increase the appeal of some of the recipes.

I did not always like the author’s tone, for example I found this quite negative and unhelpful: “The treatments as well as the diagnosis are terrifying and emotional”. He also says that if you don’t read the initial chapters (taking up 9 of the 24 pages) on flavour and taste “you will fail miserably if you cheat and skip ahead”. (I don’t think that would be the case as the principles he is extolling are fairly simple). I also don’t like the use of a lot of frozen or packet ingredients in the recipes; whilst I understand they are intended to provide short cuts, they seem to me to reduce nutritional quality.

I don’t think this book is appropriate for the UK. The information about how taste is changed by chemo and can be managed through ingredients can be found in other books from UK authors. I would recommend [The Royal Marsden cancer cookbook](#).

### **Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (March 2016)**

This book is intended for people undergoing or following chemotherapy when tastes change, their appetite may be affected and their mouth painful, but the recipes could be used by anyone.

The first 85 pages tell the reader about the author and then introduce facts about flavour, basic ingredients, equipment, and meal planning, before a ‘recipe overview’ and the recipes themselves. Although this information is relevant and informative, it is a lot to read prior to cooking. It is very long winded and, at times, repetitive. The recipes are graded by ease of preparation: beginner; moderate; advanced. They are fairly basic but also long winded; a recipe for hummus covers two pages and includes the headings: Dish description; Tasting guidelines; Ingredients; Flavour balances; Aromatics; Garnish; Recipe directions and Chefs tips – this is too much information.

The author is an American chef and some items may be difficult to source or substitute. Although I enjoy cooking, I was unfamiliar with some foodstuffs, e.g. kosher salt, frozen premade pierogies, yellow onion, and Yukon gold potatoes. Temperatures are only in Fahrenheit and ingredient amounts are abbreviated, but there is no explanation as to what they mean, for example: 'C' and '1 stick of butter'.

The cover is eye catching but the upper-case typeface makes it an uncomfortable read. I found it difficult to maintain concentration and scan read the introductory section of 85 pages. The paper quality is good, but there are no photographs to break up the text. I don't like the tone. He makes inappropriate comments, e.g. 'and don't beat yourself up about using the exact ingredients for accuracy' (p.121).

As a keen cook and owner of many cookbooks, I was very disappointed in this. There is a good deal of useful information, if you have the time and patience to read through it all, but the presentation makes it a challenging read. At the bottom of page 11, the author states: 'it is not my recipes that are going to help you, it is my theory of how to properly season and use flavour in your food that will, so don't skip ahead and start making the recipes without first reading the how-to section. You will fail miserably if you cheat and skip ahead'. The reader may just need some guidance on how/what to cook, but this book makes it appear too complicated – there are three pages on how to make an omelette!

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

This book is aimed at caregivers, family and friends. It will be useful to prepare the mindset of the cook in advance of chemotherapy. It is NOT only a recipe book; it is also a guide on how to tempt patients to eat using flavours and textures. The recipes are divided into six categories, with extra information at the start of each category, and ordered based on how much a chemo patient can tolerate the heaviness of foods. The cheat sheets interspersed throughout the first four chapters are extremely useful and interesting.

I struggled from the outset to read it as it is printed entirely in block capitals and a non-standard typeface. The author is American and some of the measurements and ingredients are not easy to understand; I don't know what 1 stick of butter is and I haven't a clue what a breakfast sausage is. I don't know where to buy Kosher Salt (apparently, like sea salt but with a finer grain structure, which is important in how the salt flavours and sticks to food) or corn muffin mix. I don't understand some of the other American ingredients, for example cilantro, chuck roast, round roast, London broil, beef round. There is no glossary, so I had to look things up online.

I found it interesting to read about the structure of the flavours and tastes in the food and how they interact and feel more inclined to have a go at cooking (in general). However, once I got to the recipes, the non-familiarity of the measures and ingredients turned me off even attempting any. I could not use this book as a cooking aid. If the reader is familiar with using America recipes, foodstuffs and measures then this book may be appropriate, otherwise it will lie unused on a bookshelf.

### **Living with breast cancer (46-55) (January 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)**

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