

**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**

# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...

*the holistic  
guide for  
cancer  
survivors*



Mark Greener  
AWARD-WINNING BIOMEDICAL WRITER

**The holistic guide for cancer  
survivors (2016)**

Greener M.

London: Sheldon Press, 2016.

xiii, 146pp.

ISBN 9781847093325.

**Average star rating 3.5 (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 is a good all-round guide to cancer, its treatment, and things that may help during and after treatment. It begins with an outline of various cancers in easy to understand terminology, goes through diet and other things to help during and after treatment, and finishes with a section on anti-cancer lifestyle to help reduce further risk. There is a logical progression, mirroring the cancer journey.

It is easy to read and simple to navigate through. There is limited jargon and the language is appropriate for a general audience. There is list of useful organisations and further reading at the end. There are no photos but there are a couple of simple illustrations in the first chapter outlining what cancer is.

This is a good general overview of what cancer is, the treatments, living with the effects of treatment, reducing your risk, and complementary therapies. The section on diets, complementary therapies, and specific issues for people during and after treatment are useful. For example, there are sections about depression, menopausal symptoms, and sexual problems, all of which can be quite common following treatment. I wish I had read it at diagnosis rather than at the end of treatment as I would have benefitted more.

### **Recovering from breast cancer (36-45) (May 2017)**

This book is full of so much useful and relevant information that anyone could find it useful. It touches on types of cancer, human physiology, explanations of treatment and medical terminology and abbreviations, suggestions on coping with side effects, as well as diagnosis, diet and lifestyle, and holistic treatments. It reiterates that you should ask many questions and check with your medical team about what you feel could assist you alongside conventional medicine and treatment, and so much more!

It flows well. It can leave you wanting more on a topic, but it does provide references and the opportunity to read and refer to more, which is helpful. It is very well written and the author explains terminology alongside the term, which I found easier than referring to a glossary. It is comprehensible for all. There are so many facts that I was unable to check all of them, but they are referenced accordingly.

The cover highlights what the book is about. The meaning of the colours (if used intentionally) in the title work well with the font reinforcing the depth of each word. The image is also quite captivating. There are only a couple of diagrams in the text, one on the mutation of cells – always good to understand – and one on receptors. I don't feel the book needs illustrations as the content is quite specific and the layout breaks up and highlights the topics.

I like that it touches on so many diverse subjects. It does not focus on one cancer; many cancers are referred to in amongst the different topics. However, the fact that it is non-specific means that it can help explain certain drugs, hormones and reactions that could be relevant to you, so it is worth a read! It provides just enough information and the references enable the reader to seek more. It is interesting all the way through; I would have been able to use some of the information and tips on our journeys and people going through their journey will find snippets to help them too! There isn't anything negative to say other than that I would have liked to have read more on some topics as they were so well written and interesting; however, as I have already said, readers can refer to the references.

**Wife and sole carer of grade 3 squamous cell carcinoma and tongue cancer survivor, carer to a late relative with glioblastoma grade 4 (36-45) (April 2017)**

This book has useful advice for anyone with cancer or caring for someone with cancer. There is enough medical evidence to be authoritative, without being overly scientific, so it is suitable for anyone who needs to know more about specific issues relating to health during, and particularly after, cancer.

The content is in a logical order. Chapter 1 (Understanding the big C) is a useful introduction, particularly for those who don't really understand how or why it happens. Chapter 2 (Conventional cancer treatments) explains treatments, their effects on the body, and the emotional effects, and has tips to help make taking medicine easier and practical considerations (What happens after treatment ends? How can I remember to take my medicine? What are the financial considerations?). Chapter 3 discusses food and eating issues. These are all good topics for survivors or carers, but Chapter 4 is the most useful; it discusses specific issues that survivors face (pain, digestive problems, sleep, fatigue, depression, skin, sexual problems) and suggests ways to alleviate them. The book ends with useful addresses and references.

It seems well researched; I didn't notice any inaccuracies and it's easy to understand, and does not talk down to the reader. The biography of the author mentions that he was in biomedical research before writing for magazines on health and biology. His experience shows; the writing is clear, precise and backed up with data, but not so overwhelmingly scientific that it will put off lay readers. There is no glossary, but technical words are explained as they occur and there is a list of further reading. The paperback is appealing and the right size to fit in my work bag, not too thick! The text is clear and well laid out; the text is interspersed with lists and tips, and the author uses grey boxes to explain topics in more detail, for example: What is lymph? (p. 6); Receptors (p. 24); The five stages of grief (p. 32).

The tone is understanding but matter of fact and practical. I like the fact that the book considers many emotional aspects of cancer, e.g. loss of control (pp. 40-42), refusing treatment (p. 36), spirituality, (p. 122), social networks (p. 123), and pets (p. 124). The chapter on CAMS discusses how to help make the cancer journey less stressful, e.g. art, active relaxation, acupuncture, guided imagery. I like that the author includes details of side-effects of treatment; these are not often discussed although they affect people in unpleasant ways, e.g. stomatitis, pyrexia, menopausal symptoms, sexual problems, mucositis, and dry mouth. The advice is sensible and advises people to check with their treatment team before booking treatments such as massage. A small point: it is impossible to include organisations for each cancer, but it would be nice to see some for women's gynaecological cancers, e.g. Ovacome or the Eve Appeal.

This book is very useful for tips for dealing with specific issues (physical and mental) relating to cancer or its treatment. I have given it five stars because it has very useful practical advice, sensibly including warnings about CAMS (it is not promising miracle cures, just easing the cancer journey) combined with an easy to read style. It also has some new, thoughtful, useful, and genuinely interesting points that a lot of books do not include, for example: practical ways to break bad news; putting your affairs in order; side effects of religion and spirituality; dealing with issues around food. There are also more hopeful topics, such as how animals are therapeutic, ecotherapy, the benefits of 'forest bathing' and how to feel more in control throughout your treatment.

### **Uterine cancer survivor (46-55) (January 2017)**

Mark Greener's background is biomedical research so he seems in command of his subject. This one of the Sheldon Press guides known for their concise and accurate information, readers may have come across their other publications. The title is clear and unfussy and book does what it says on cover.

It is divided into six chapters. The first two cover understanding the "Big C" and conventional treatments and give an excellent and concise description of what is happening inside our bodies and the medical treatments available to help us. The next two chapters (Putting food first; Tips to help specific issues facing survivors) again are very clear. There is much more overlap here between what doctors can provide and how complementary and alternative therapies (CAMS) can help and support us. The last two chapters cover an anti-cancer lifestyle and how CAMs can help. At all times, the author advises us to check with or inform our health team about using CAMs alongside conventional medicine. He suggests CAMs are becoming increasingly acceptable amongst the medical profession, that more are becoming interested in integrated medicine. This may not be every reader's experience but a sensible book like this will go a long way to reassure sceptical medics.

The book has an excellent index, references, useful addresses, and further reading. It is possibly the clearest and most sensible book I've read on holistic care and therapies for us "survivors". The language is not flowery or poetic but well researched and practical; it is a book to read and then keep for easy reference. I'd recommend it unhesitatingly, especially for cancer support groups and centres for their libraries.

### **Living with non-Hodgkin lymphoma (66-75) (January 2017)**

This is one of the most useful books I have read. It is most useful for understanding how cancer develops, the treatment process and how treatment works, stating facts and dispelling myths. It also covers nutrition, and exercise, sometimes missing in cancer books.

It is easy to read. I found the author's style very easy to understand. The language and explanations are clear and precise (there is no glossary). There is a lot of information to pack in but I didn't notice any factual inaccuracies. There is supporting evidence with up-to-date research to back up the topics. The cover is calming and pleasant to look at. It looks just like any other book and doesn't scream "cancer"! The typeface is pleasant to read. The title offers the idea that you can help yourself to feel better while having treatment. It's a positive title and a gentle alternative to the harsh medical treatments.

I found this book easy to read, the author's language makes the content easy to understand, he describes how cancer mutates within our cells, diagnosis of cancer and treatment plans for a variety of cancers. I was interested in the information on breast cancer and the author enabled me to understand more about my cancer, including practical advice on nutrition, exercise and meditation which is often missing from your consultant appointments due to time constraints.

#### **Living with HER-2 breast cancer (46-55) (January 2017)**

This book gives valuable information about cancer and how to deal with the effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy; it would therefore be useful for anyone affected by cancer: patients; carers; or other interested persons. It is a book you can dip into to look up aspects of dealing with cancer either for yourself or to help other people. I like the detailed information it gives about cancer in general and what to expect from treatment, the things the professionals do not always think to tell you. It is very easy to understand. The cover is attractive and the book is not too thick or heavy to hold.

I did expect it to be more about alternative treatments which, although very beneficial, should be used in addition to conventional therapy. Indeed, this book follows that belief and starts off with useful facts about cancer followed by the side effects of chemotherapy and radiotherapy and the different types of both these treatments. It gives valuable advice on nutrition and supplements – the pros and cons. It also deals with specific issues facing survivors that result from their treatment and how to deal with these, which is very useful. It also deals with emotional aspects, including anxiety and depression, again very useful. There is a short section on complementary therapies and how they can be beneficial. The final chapter is about ways of staying healthy after cancer.

This is a very good book and a must for everyone's bookshelves. I highly recommend it; it is one of the most informative books I have read on this subject that is easy to understand. Even if you are not a cancer patient; at some time, someone you know or you yourself might develop cancer and this is such a good reference book.

#### **Womb cancer in remission (66-75) (November 2016)**

The title and subtitle of this book suggest that it is intended for people who have completed treatment but it would be very helpful straight after diagnosis. It is a comprehensive guide to evidence-based research and helpful advice for people whose lives are touched by cancer, not just 'survivors'.

The first part takes the reader through the nature of cancer, and the different sorts of conventional medical treatment. This is very informative, and can spare the newly diagnosed many hours of trawling the internet. The author then explores the importance of a helpful diet through the stages of cancer. This is not a superficial examination; he delves into the importance of certain nutrients and food choices. He devotes a significant part of the book to tips to help specific and wide-ranging issues facing survivors, including sleep disturbances, fatigue, pain, and depression. There follows a chapter on complementary and alternative approaches, using research findings to support the information. He then considers an anti-cancer lifestyle – aspects such as diet, exercise, and complementary approaches – and gives useful addresses and references. Information is used from rigorous research methods.

It is a slim paperback, with text in an easy-to-read font. It is very easy to understand. The author has written many books and articles for healthcare professionals, scientists and patients, and his writing style is clear and authoritative. Although the information is dense, he manages to summarise useful information in ways that are easy to understand e.g. using lists or subtitles to separate subjects of interest. This adds to the clarity of the presentation and a reader-friendly approach.

There is a huge amount of objective information in this slim book – an invaluable resource for everyone. I like just about everything about it! I shall certainly recommend it, and buy it for other people, if the need arises. The title undersells it somehow. I had been expecting something more vague and opinionated.

**Former health professional. Carer. Friend (56-65) (November 2016)**



This is a useful book for anyone who has cancer, or a carer, family member or friend of a cancer patient. There is transparent explanation of what happens at different stages of cancer. It looks at diet and lifestyle, presenting possibilities of what can be done, and what might happen when. It is full of tips and suggestions but based on knowledge rather than feelings or experience. There is no “You really should do this”, just ideas presented in a factual way. It is very easy to understand and terms are well explained. It looks like any other self-help book.

I like that it is written with knowledge, honesty, and transparency by someone with a biomedical background and therefore some knowledge and facts rather than personal feeling about what could be good/right for someone with cancer. My only disappointment is that there is nothing about how to cope if you have a cancer that cannot be treated, that might develop or might not but is there all the time.

**Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (September 2017)**

I like that this book covers so much material in a way that is quick and easy to read. The tone is matter of fact, not patronising or preachy as so many other books. It's a brief introduction to a complex topic and it would have been easy for the author to make the material difficult and dense. It will be most useful to patients during treatment, and family and friends. This is when people need to know this information.

I especially like the chapter on CAMs. The author packs in an amazing amount of material. It seems unbiased, with reference to the fact that pharma companies pay for clinical trials, so it's no surprise that there isn't a lot of evidence for CAMs.

The only thing I dislike is the early discussion around secondary cancer; it seems to be very hopeless and assumes that people with secondary tumours can't be cured and need to live the best life possible. I may be reading too much into it, but it made me uncomfortable. Elsewhere, the author talks about hope, which is good, but I think I'd be upset if I had advanced cancer and came across this material early on.

There is some guidance about fever that goes against most advice for patients on chemotherapy. The threshold for getting medical help seems quite high. However, the guidance isn't specific to chemotherapy. Also, counsellors generally don't offer practical help, although counselling may help patients feel able to get practical help.

This book is very well researched, although, presumably for simplicity, sometimes lacks specifics that would be interesting and useful. It's not that there's new material here but rather that it's all in one place; this makes it easier for patients and those who care for and about them, to get an introduction to important information. Its comprehensiveness makes this a very useful book but I might hesitate to recommend it to people with secondary cancers. If it weren't for my concerns about the lack of hope for people with secondary cancer, I would have given it five stars.

### **Long-term survivor of breast cancer (66-75) (March 2017)**

A good time to read this book would be shortly after diagnosis. A positive outlook is always a good start to surviving cancer and this book gives you the knowledge to understand and help your treatment and how to cope afterwards. It has something for everyone, from patients to carers and professionals. The topics do jump around a little but overall it flows well. It is very clear and to the point using simple methods. The paper is good quality with an easy to read typeface.

I like the simplicity of the topics discussed but I don't like the end of the book. The book gives you a good feeling about surviving cancer and ways to improve your health, but then ends on a downer discussing dealing with death. This topic seems a little irrelevant in a book for cancer survivors.

This book easily deals with the everyday issues that cancer brings. From the how and why it happens, to ways to make life easier during and after treatment. As a survivor, I can see areas that would have been useful when I was diagnosed to help me through my treatment and not just after.

### **Tonsil cancer survivor (36-45) (February 2017)**

This book covers topics that anyone who has survived cancer will find useful. It is most appropriate at diagnosis as it provides good information and guidance, introduces the options available and the opportunity to engage in joint decisions most relevant to the individual. It empowers individuals to take charge of their condition rather than wait for suggestions from health professionals, by which time they are on a downward spiral and less motivated.

It is fairly easy to understand but a glossary to address some of the clinical terms would be useful. At times, particularly early on, the author gets a bit carried away with clinical terms; this could confuse and overwhelm the reader and result in them abandoning the book. Overall, I like the look of the book; the different fonts and shaded areas soften the tone and make it more appealing and easier to refer to.

It conveys a clear message on the importance of readjustment and self-management to regain control. It is done in a sensitive manner, helping the patient to relate to some of the challenges yet recognise it as a normal process. I will probably recommend it but I will stress the importance of skipping areas that feel heavy or too overwhelming; readers can return to these at another time or perhaps engage in a conversation with someone else as a way of understanding the information.

### **Living with the consequence of breast cancer (56-65) (January 2017)**



This is useful, especially for people without a healthcare background, as an overview of things to consider with a cancer diagnosis. It is easy to read and understand. The book has a smooth cover, with an attractive simple design on the cover.

The title suggested to me that there would be more information on complementary cancer support, but that section was limited.

### **Carer (36-45) (July 2017)**

This book covers a wide range of topics about cancer. It's informative up to a point but is quite basic. It would be useful for anyone affected by cancer, specifically someone just diagnosed, to learn how to cope with the physical and psychological side-effects of diagnosis. Health professionals would also benefit from learning the strategies that cancer patients can use to help themselves.

It has six sections, starting with an introduction to cancer. The author uses language that is understandable for the layperson and explains more complex ideas. The cover is appealing; the colour scheme is fresh, and the layout is nice and simple, but the strapline "Live well and feel better AFTER cancer" put me off right away. I'm living with cancer but consider myself a cancer survivor, there is no AFTER cancer for me! So, it will mostly attract people with curative cancers. The quality of the paper is good and the font is easy to read. Bullet points are used effectively throughout.

I noticed a few inaccuracies. For example, in the section on restrictive diets the author states that "We now know, however, that fasting starves your healthy tissues and may shorten survival, undermine your quality of life, exacerbate fatigue, and delay and lengthen recovery". The reference used to back this up is from 2001 and I'm not sure "we now know" anything, especially since just this week we heard on the news how intermittent fasting can help people with diabetes! It suggests that people eat ginger biscuits, and drink ginger beer. I'm not sure this is the wisest advice. It also advises people to "Use the bed for sex and sleep only." What? In that order?

The strapline "Live well and feel better after cancer" doesn't really match the content; it implies that the book is about the scars that cancer leaves but it covers everything, from what cancer is, to the side-effects of chemotherapy – that's not after cancer! The title grabbed me, but the content is disappointing. I don't like how it skims topics. It mentions, for example, that aromatherapy can help and that there are hundreds of essential oils, but doesn't mention which ones help cancer patients, i.e. frankincense! Also, it ends on quite a downer – preparing yourself for DEATH = depressing!

This book covers many topics at a very basic level. It is good for anyone who has no knowledge of cancer and wants to learn strategies to help them live with it better. However, it is just a basic overview – the author does not give many scientific examples. I can't say I learned very much, but I've been reading about cancer for over five years now. I might recommend it to an older person diagnosed with cancer; it's a bit basic for the younger cancer survivor.

### **Living with breast cancer (36-45) (February 2017)**

In some ways, this book reads a little like a textbook, particularly the first few pages. However, it is very useful for anyone interested in researching complementary therapies, which can be very comforting for some patients, myself included. The chapters on complementary procedures (e.g. massage, aromatherapy, and the use of certain vitamins) are particularly interesting and may really help people going through cancer. There is a helpful list of addresses at the end, such as Teenage Cancer Trust and British Association of Medical Hypnosis.

It is easy to understand, well laid out and looks good. The topics are in logical order but the book ends with the fact that you may die. The final chapter, with headings such as "Towards the end", "Putting your affairs in order", "Death and the carer" and "Complicated grief" isn't helpful. It is a little depressing, particularly as so many people now live longer with cancer. A more hopeful end chapter might be beneficial.

I might recommend it; it will depend on the prospective reader. It covers all cancers, so might be overwhelming; it does feel a bit heavy at times. It's well researched but the tone leans towards dying at times. I'm not sure how helpful that is; on occasion, I found some chapters a little depressing. It is interesting but reads more like a textbook and the tone could be lighter.

### **Burkitt lymphoma survivor (36-45) (January 2017)**

This is a good book to read from the onset of living with, or caring for someone with, cancer. It flows in a chronological order, focusing on certain aspects that occur from the onset of cancer. It deals with a definition and understanding of cancer, a deeper explanation regarding conventional treatment and provides suggestions for specific issues. There is also a well-structured and informative section on complementary and alternative therapies, and lifestyle approaches relevant for survivors.

The language is simple to read and flows well. It is easy and enjoyable to read for the audience/lay person. Some technical words/terms/abbreviations, such as CAMs (p. 94), are not explained in the text and there is no glossary to explain it either. It is highlighted and explained only in the introduction (p. xi). It is a lightweight book and a good size, easy to carry and hold. The cover is pleasant on the eye; the colours give it a calming and comfortable feeling and the image also reflects calmness and mindfulness. There is enough information on the back and it is easy to read. The paper is a good weight and allows the reader to turn the pages easily without wear and tear. The paper is not white, which is an advantage, as it does not contribute to eye strain. The chapters and sections are well organised, with relevant subheadings and titles in bold. Bullet points and factual references/summaries are presented in highlighted boxes, which are very relevant to the given text. A few, relevant black-and-white illustrations fit in well with the discussions but more images could enhance the attractiveness of the book and make it more appealing to the reader.

The author has used a descriptive tone and approach, which serves the purpose of the book. It is easy to read, follow and understand, it is jargon free, and to the point. It is a pleasant, informative, and easy read, which is very specific and relevant to the subject matter. Anyone could easily read it, from the lay person, through cancer survivors and carers, to those such as students of health care/alternative medicines and researchers. It is well organised with separate sections for references, further reading, and an index. Additionally, there is a much-needed section of useful addresses; this adds value, is appealing, and is a positive aspect of this book.

### **Relative of a breast cancer patient (36-45) (January 2017)**

This is probably most useful for the general information about wellbeing. The author writes in a sympathetic style, taking the reader from initial diagnosis and explanations about cancer and its types, through treatment, self-care, right through to the end.

Some of the cancer information is a little overwhelming but the author does generally use terms that an intelligent reader will understand. I read it in sections, which are easier to manage. The book has a clean, uncluttered cover, readable typeface, and serviceable quality paper. There are no photographs, just a few diagrams.

The author cites many academic sources. I followed up only one. He refers to the carer burden (p. 31) and quotes from a paper (34), that providing care can take up as much as 20 hours per week. Academic papers don't necessarily give an accurate analysis and in this case the paper itself seems to have drawn source data from other academic studies, of which only 15 examples are carers. I am not clear if these are UK based but this cannot be viewed with confidence; from experience, the figure

is much higher. The author is addressing the patient who may or may not be well, or skilled, enough to wade through papers primarily targeted at clinicians.

It is impossible to write a book covering all aspects of cancer, including self-care, but this is a step towards addressing the importance of sound wellbeing practice. I like the idea of looking at treatment as not simply the clinical processes. The author does not claim to provide all the answers but for someone newly diagnosed or their carer (particularly their carer), it is an introduction. It doesn't demonstrate the pivotal role of the carer as part of the clinical team, or recognise the breadth of their role.

**Caring for someone with the consequences of treatment for prostate cancer (56-65) (November 2016)**



Several sections of this book could be very useful to cancer patients, in particular, the very good advice about nutrition and general well-being, although it does contain some information that isn't backed up by medical opinion. It could also give health professionals a better understanding of holistic therapies and enable them to provide their patients with information if asked.

The author handles the topic in a logical order and it's very easy reading. Overall, it is easy to understand although I had to look up the word locus! There is a list of references, but no glossary of terms; however, the author explains most of the terminology in simple language throughout the book. It does have a rather cheap feel about it but the text is easy to read. The cover isn't particularly appealing, a little too plain to catch my eye in a shop. Overall, the tone is good, although in parts it does read rather like a lecture.

I found the dietary information helpful and the explanations of cancer and its treatment very easy to understand. My main problem with this book is that it frequently refers to complementary and alternative medicine. Whilst most health care professionals support complementary therapies, alternative medicine is something entirely different and the author hasn't made this clear. My other criticism is that it contains too broad a range of topics, some are vast and complicated – such as treating anxiety and depression, and dealing with loss – and can't be properly dealt with in a few short paragraphs.

I am very interested in complementary health and general well-being for cancer patients but this book encompasses too many topics and makes unsubstantiated claims.

**Living with breast cancer; friend of someone with prostate cancer; a volunteer and trustee of cancer support group (46-55) (May 2017)**

At times, I struggled to decide who this book is really aimed at. It appears to be aimed at people living with or after cancer and states at the start that it is not a medical book, but there are a lot of statistics and references to other works that make it seem more like a textbook for someone in the medical profession.

The headline topics are in a logical order, starting with understanding what cancer is, through treatments and dealing with cancer in different ways, to an anti-cancer lifestyle. I did not notice any inaccuracies but I am not a medical or dietary expert. Some parts are very easy to understand, particularly the chapter on specific issues facing cancer survivors. However, the number of statistics, often presented differently (for example as a fraction and a percentage) makes it hard to understand. There are also 132 references that I would guess are of very little interest to the average lay reader but which made me feel I was missing something. The tone changes; the overall tone is matter of fact, but sometimes implies a knowledge of medical matters, at others it almost talks down to the reader. There is also some repetition.

First impressions are promising; the book has a smooth tactile feel (the feel of a book is very important to me) and a fresh, minimalistic cover. The pages are good quality with a standard serif typeface. There are three illustrations; all appear in the first 25 pages and add very little and one is left wondering why they are there at all. The rest of the book is text with several text boxes in grey, giving a rather sombre feel.

I like how the book starts with some information about what cancer is and goes on to outline the many treatments, giving a good background to the subject. I particularly like chapter 4 (Tips to help specific issues facing survivors); it has lots of useful tips and information on a wide spectrum of issues, often broken down into bullet points making it easy to read. There is a lot of information on diet too, which is not something that interests me but I know a lot of patients and survivors look to diet as a way of managing their illness and symptoms.

Unfortunately, there is quite a lot I don't like about this book. The author needs to decide if he is writing a medical journal or a self-help book; it feels like he couldn't make up his mind and varies between the two. There is far too much emphasis on diet, and although I realise that this is of great interest to a lot of people, it crops up repeatedly and, with a few exceptions, is not cancer specific but basic information on general healthy eating. There are too many statistics, presented in too many ways, and many distracting references. The last chapter covers adopting an anti-cancer lifestyle, which is useful, but ends with end of life and dealing with death. This covers only four pages but should in a separate chapter dealing with this issue or left out altogether. The author should have narrowed down his focus somewhat.

There is some useful information in this book but one has to trawl through a lot of less useful information to find it, particularly as the layout does not lend itself to browsing. I think I can find most of the information in here more directly by going to the Macmillan Cancer Support or other websites. There is so much information available about cancer, in books, leaflets or on websites, and this book does nothing to make me inclined to recommend it over other sources of information.

This is an ambitious book in that it covers everything from “what is cancer?”, through treatments, diet, complementary and alternative medicines, to end-of-life care. It also

includes tips on specific issues facing survivors and adopting an anti-cancer lifestyle; there is lots of food for thought, quite literally as food is a major topic throughout. There is much information but it is made less readable by the constant inclusion of statistics, in different formats, and the 132 references to other sources, which may be of interest to a medical professional but possibly less so to a lay reader. And that is the crux of my issue with this book, it struggles to decide if it is aimed at cancer survivors and their carers, or professionals. Of course, there is no reason it can't be of value to both but I struggled to wade through references and technical jargon. I did however find the chapter on tips for specific issues very useful and informative.

I would probably give it 3.5 stars if I could as it has some useful information, but not enough to make it stand out from the vast number of books on this topic. Apart from occasionally, it failed to hold my attention and became increasingly laborious to read.

### **Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (April 2017)**

The title implies that this book is aimed at survivors but, if I were a survivor, I like to think I would already know the contents of Chapter 1. I probably would not want to start with an understanding of what cancer is – I would have already passed the stage of “exploration”. Ditto Chapter 2 on conventional treatments. The logical start point (Food and holistic treatment) is not addressed until Chapters 4 and 5.

The first two chapters are difficult and more appropriate for a health professional than an average patient. The author tries to use humour and chatty language to describe body systems but the language might be beyond the average survivor's experience and hard to understand if unfamiliar with post-GCSE biology. There is no glossary. The author sometimes explains a word after it is used so there's an element of going back and forth to understand what is meant. Survivors may have accessed the scientific information earlier and want more information on how to tap into natural, holistic therapies. The cover and title are attractive and easy on the eye but belie the technical start. The layout is dense; there are no pictures or images and it looks and reads like a textbook. The few diagrams look too technical and are not in colour.

Chapters 3-5 on holistic therapies, tips, and food (the chapters that live up to the title), are the main reason I would buy this book, but Chapter 5 on complementary therapy could be more detailed. If I had skimmed the initial chapters and then looked at the holistic therapies, I may have been put off; there is insufficient detail about which therapies help which cancers.

I probably wouldn't recommend it. The first two chapters are too technical and the last chapter on lifestyle covers obvious topics that survivors would pick up in general non-holistic books or information. Chapter 5 is the only place that deals with CAMs (defined only in the introduction) and I would have expected much more on holistic therapies, where to get them, and their efficacy. The author states there is not enough time to give more detail but could have cut out bits, or all, of the first two chapters. It may be a little disappointing for those who bought the book solely for information on complementary and alternative therapies.

### **I know someone with pancreatic cancer (56-65) (March 2017)**

This book tries to deal with all aspects of cancer. It has some informative and useful sections – for example understanding cancer – and a comprehensive chapter on conventional treatments. It is obviously well researched and the author well informed. However, I didn't find it easy. For a start, the first chapter is called 'Understanding the Big C'; who calls cancer the Big C anymore? The chapter heading of 'CAMs can help' assumes that people know what CAMs are; even though this is explained later in the text, a chapter heading should be explanatory. The chapter 'An anti-cancer lifestyle' leads into a section headed 'Towards the end ' and while this discusses important issues, it seems an odd place to put such a section, without any warning.

So even though it has a lot of helpful information on a wide range of topics, I don't feel it has been put together or presented in a way that is reader friendly.

### **Survivor of breast cancer, melanoma, and lymphoma (46-55) (January 2017)**



I can't see this book being useful to anyone. The author handles the topic in the same way that I have seen in another booklet written by an herbalist for cancer therapy. It was so similar I had to check back to ensure that it wasn't a direct copy. It is difficult to see why it has been called "a holistic guide..." It appears to be a set of things that a doctor would say to a patient given the time, e.g. eat well, don't smoke, if you're unsure ask a doctor. It certainly doesn't require this book to say these things.

It would be difficult to list all the inaccuracies. I would suggest that the author is out of their depth with this topic and not the right person to handle it. Some areas are covered in too simplistic a manner, e.g. lifestyle advice to stop smoking: this is hardly a revelation and had I invested in the book I would feel cheated. Others are poorly explained, seemingly because the author does not understand them very well, e.g. acupuncture, which he doesn't seem to have realised can be accessed in two very different ways: it would have been helpful to explain how acupuncture on the NHS with a physiotherapist differs to private practice with a degree trained acupuncturist. There are so many examples as the author has missed the point of each therapy mentioned and thus none are explained properly.

The book is not as big as I was expecting. I assumed, given the nature of the subject, that it would be bigger as there is a lot of ground to cover. The cover and colouring are pleasing on the eye. A flick through the book suggests it will be easy to read – there are plenty of clear sections and font looks good.

This book is very simplistic, so much so that it doesn't cover anything at all in sufficient detail for it to be useful. I would have expected as a minimum that the book would provide sufficient information to get a feel for each area covered. The reader could then decide if they would like to explore a topic further in another book. Unfortunately, this book doesn't provide enough scope to do that. All aspects of this book have been covered in other literature much better. This book adds nothing.

### **Living with ovarian cancer, 36-45 (February 2017)**

## Unrated

This book is not worthy of any star rating. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone because, in addition to the reasons below, it is written by a medical writer and former research pharmacologist who has no direct experience of cancer, cancer treatments, cancer side-effects, or cancer patients and their carers. The author writes market-analysis reports for pharmaceutical executives so it is no surprise that he reports from sources that he has chosen in the absence of independent research. There are much better books on which to spend your energy and money, books written from direct experience that will produce the results that someone with cancer is seeking. Try authors like Chris Woollams or Jane Plant.

The strapline is: "Live well and feel better after cancer." On page xii, the author writes "No-one can accurately predict the severity of your side effects or the long-term complications you'll experience." This book is written for someone who has received cancer treatment and is experiencing the side effects of pharmaceutical drugs. However, the content is too simplistic and fails to get below the surface of what is already known, and readily available, in the media.

The author claims that he "translates" medical and biological material. This book is so superficial and simple that it isn't worth the read. The author acknowledges this when he writes: "This book offers general information and suggestions...", in my mind, extremely general. There are factual inaccuracies. For example, the author claims that a third of the UK population are cancer survivors (back cover). CRUK reports that 50% of people survive cancer for 10 or more years in England and Wales (2010-11). (The book was published in 2016, so no excuse). In another example, he spends seven lines (p. 106) writing about mistletoe therapy. He doesn't use its medical name "Iscador," and neither word can be found in the index. Furthermore, he writes about it under the heading: "Herbal help for people with cancer." He claims it is useful only "when used alongside conventional treatments" which clearly is not the case. Iscador/Mistletoe Therapy is an immunotherapy treatment. However, the author fails to write about it in the section on immunotherapy, preferring to promote "Drugs called immunotherapies – such as interferons and interleukin 2..." albeit Iscador/mistletoe therapy works in the same way to "activate the immune system and boost the body's ability to destroy cancer cells" and can produce "flu-like symptoms, rashes or swelling around the injection site" in much the same way (p. 29).

This book is very simplistic but not in a helpful way. For example, on page 99, the author states: "During art therapy you use paint, clay, collage, sand or writing poetry... it's for your benefit..." I don't need to waste my time or my energy reading this. Anyone could take an educated guess at what materials are used in art therapy and that it is beneficial (otherwise it wouldn't be available). People diagnosed with cancer are not dummies. I didn't find it appealing. It is written from a pessimistic standpoint and full of "may" do something, not "will" do something. The author doesn't expect anyone to live with, or be cured of cancer. I also found it insulting. For example, the author says (p. 123) that "Some people seem to 'over-rely' on their relationship with God to aid recovery. This can develop into a form of fatalism, which means people are less likely to follow screening and treatment recommendations. Living a fulfilled life depends on taking an active approach: God helps those who help

themselves." So, does the author believe that thieves who help themselves are helped by God, and those that share their resources are not helped by God? My understanding of God, is that God helps everyone. Furthermore, my decision not to have treatment was based on science not on my Faith (three out of every four women are overtreated for DCIS; a condition that may not affect them in their lifetime). However, my Faith has given me the confidence to live with this decision, to be mindful of body changes and to live a "fulfilled life." The "active approach" does not have to be conventional or one approved by the author. The important issue is happiness, confidence, and self-esteem.

The book doesn't provide any meaningful information and doesn't go below the surface of knowledge that is widely known in the public domain. For example, Chapter 6, "An anti-cancer lifestyle" has four pages on quitting smoking, three pages written on drinking and one and a half pages on exercise. We all know that smoking and alcohol is not in the interests of good health and exercise is. So, what's new? In my mind, an "anti-cancer lifestyle" incorporates so much more. In fact, I would say that this book is insulting to all those cancer "survivors" who are mindful of lifestyle and environmental factors (not mentioned in the book at all) in relation to their cancer diagnosis, and who are living against the odds that the author gives them. The author then writes about the "side-effects of religion and spirituality," and devotes four pages to end of life including "Putting your affairs in order", "Death and the carer" and "Complicated grief."

The author writes (p. xii) "I hope that the suggestions in this book will make life easier for you and your family. I am afraid, however, that there are no guarantees." The author's last words on page 128 are: "I wish you well." To me, this evidences a lack of confidence in what he has written, so why should I waste my energy reading it.

This book is not useful at all. It's not even good for sign-posting. It doesn't mention environmental factors in this "holistic" guide. I definitely would not recommend it to anyone serious about making lifestyle and environmental changes. If the reader is genuinely interested and serious about making such changes, then I recommend reading "Everything you need to know to help you beat cancer" by Chris Woollams and "Beat cancer: the 10-step plan to help you overcome and prevent cancer" by Jane Plant and Mustafa Djamgoz, in addition to learning about nutrition.

**Untreated DCIS breast cancer (October 2012) (46-55) (January 2017)**

# 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, August 2018**

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