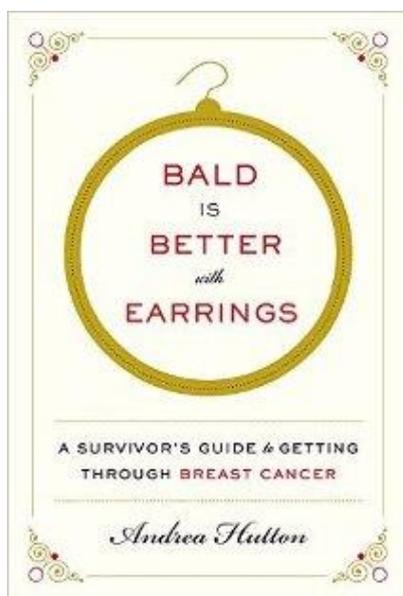


**MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT**

BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Bald is better with earrings. A survivor's guide to getting through breast cancer (2015)

Hutton A.

New York: HarperCollins, 2015.

xiv, 206pp.

ISBN 9780062375650.

Average star rating 4.3 (out of 5)

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When I first received this book, I thought it was a little small and thin to contain much information. I was very wrong; it is concise and packed with information and tips and a very easy read. I read it in two days whilst recovering from surgery and it was informative and comforting. It is most useful for someone having or about to start treatment; it is a great guide to treatment and the emotions and issues that arise. However, it has much information to help anyone wanting to support a patient.

Each chapter deals with a stage of treatment. Although some people experience chemotherapy before surgery it is quite easy to jump to the section required. There are no factual inaccuracies, but the author is American, so some of the tests and procedures are slightly different for those having treatment in the UK. The author writes from her experience of treatment and explains any technical or medical expressions as she goes through her journey. Because it is from personal experience it is clear and easy to understand for anyone in treatment themselves.

I love the appearance of the book. The version I read is cream with gold, red and black lettering. It is a bright book that gives a positive feel for a difficult subject. I like that fact that it is a paperback and the pages themselves seem to be on some kind of recycled paper. This gives the book a 'soft' feel in a tactile way, which was soothing for some reason, given what was going on in my life at the time. There is one photo in the book, at the back, of the author. I really appreciated this; by the end, I felt as if I knew the author in some way as she had revealed her own story in the book.

I really like how the author writes. She tells her story in a way that you feel like you know her by the end of the book and in a strange way she knows you because of the shared experience you are going through. Yet at the same time the book is very informative. I really like the 'Top 5 Tips' at the end of each chapter; this is such a great idea. During diagnosis and treatment, you can read a lot of information but due to the stress of what is going on, and sometimes the effect of treatment itself, it can be hard to retain it all. This summary allows you to go back to a section and pull out the important bits. The tips are useful as well, and on point.

I wish I had read this book at the start of my diagnosis; having said that, I found it beneficial having nearly completed treatment. It is very informative about all breast cancer treatment, including chemotherapy, but offers emotional support as well. One thing the author recommends a lot is a support group. She stresses the importance of being able to talk to people who can relate to what you have been through. Having read this book and being able to relate to everything she writes about, I can see where she is coming from. It has given me the push to join a support group, which is not really my thing, but I am going to give it a go anyway and see what happens!

I absolutely would recommend this book to anyone newly diagnosed or already in treatment for breast cancer.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (May 2017)

It is useful to read about someone else's experience of cancer and this book is useful for all aspects, from diagnosis to end of treatment.

It is very easy to understand. I didn't notice any inaccuracies as such, just the differences in the US medical system from that in the UK. I like the format of the book, although it may not appeal to everyone; the cover is very flexible, so easy to hold and read, I like the feel of it.

I like the author's say-it-as-it-is approach. It is a personal account of her cancer journey but she is truthful about her journey and I certainly smiled and agreed with certain elements as they were very like my experience.

The author is from the USA, which has a different approach from the NHS. US cancer patients can choose their surgeons, oncologists, and pastoral support but we can't do that in the UK unless we go private.

Living with breast cancer (46-55) (April 2017)

This is a very enjoyable read. It is very honest and at times very humorous. I found that I related to almost all her story. It will be useful for someone with breast cancer, their partner or carer, and family and friends.

Andrea tells her story in a very easy to read manner. She talks about her family and how they coped with various stages of her treatment; this might help readers to cope if faced with something similar. It is very easy to understand and a very appealing book with a good layout. I like the humour and the fact that it doesn't drag on.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (March 2017)

This book would be very helpful for someone with cancer, as the author describes her experience from diagnosis, through treatment, to life after treatment. Not only does she give insight into her experience, she also provides many helpful tips. It will be particularly helpful to someone about to start treatment, or already having treatment; it will help give them an idea of what to expect.

The book is in a clear logical order, with the chapters split into clear subcategories. Throughout the book, the most important pieces of information are summarised in boxes. This is very helpful as it allows the reader to go back and quickly pick out key information. It is very easy to understand. What little technical language there is, is explained and the language and tone is appropriate for the target audience. It will most likely be read by someone with breast cancer and the author is very honest about her experience. She explains in a straightforward, yet light-hearted way what someone about to go through a similar experience can expect.

The quality of the book is very good. The colour scheme used for the cover is appealing. I like how the key points and tips mentioned in the text are summarised and presented in boxes throughout the book. This allows you to look back and easily re-read the main points.

I like the light-hearted, yet honest tone of the author. She describes the emotions she felt during the different stages of her treatment and provides useful advice for other patients about to go through treatment. The book covers all the main topics that someone diagnosed with breast cancer will want to know about.

This is a great book for anyone that wants to read an honest account of someone's experience of life after being diagnosed with breast cancer. It provides an insight into what the author felt during her experience and what she learnt from it. Although everyone has a different experience, it can still be very helpful to read someone else's story to get some idea of what to expect. Because the author has been through breast cancer treatment herself, she can offer practical tips that she learnt during her treatment. It is not for someone that wants facts about breast cancer as it doesn't go into depth about the science behind it.

I recommend this book to anyone diagnosed with breast cancer and about to start treatment. It allows the reader to see things from the perspective of someone that has been through it and to gain an understanding of what it feels like. The author can explain to the reader how she felt during this experience and what she learnt from it. She covers the main topics the reader will want to know about, including: the tests carried out during diagnosis; her treatment, which included surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation; and life after treatment. She also covers other topics that breast cancer patients may be concerned about, for example losing your hair and how to deal with family members and friends. The best part of the book is the advice the author offers. There are many tips throughout, from practical tips to help the patient be more comfortable during treatment, to emotional advice and other useful suggestions.

Family member of breast cancer survivor (Under 25) (January 2017)

This is such an easy read that anyone will find it interesting. It is best read before treatment. It is easy to understand and I like the informal appearance. I love the fact that you can just dip in as necessary; depending where you are in your treatment, it's easy to find the bits you want. The author is American and her treatment differs from treatment here but that doesn't detract from the book. I love the light-touch humour.

Breast cancer survivor – twice (56-65) (November 2016)

This incredibly informative book guides you through every possible outcome of breast cancer. It is a systematic guide to living with breast cancer. I like its honesty; the author's experience will give hope and confidence to those with breast cancer.

It is a pretty book in terms of font, colour, and sizing, although the paper is flimsy. The order is logical and the language conversational; the author allows you to enter her world and understand everything about breast cancer. Her tone has twists of humour at appropriate points, for example dealing with emotional relatives. A very clever book; I strongly recommend it.

A friend of a someone with cancer (Under 25) (August 2016)



This is very useful for anyone with breast cancer – before, during, and after – as a supportive, hand-holding guide. It is very easy to understand, written for women who have breast cancer, but from the perspective of someone who has had it, been there and got the T-shirt. Because of this, the language is user friendly and the explanations of the different processes, treatments and “events” that may occur are simple and clear. It's a nice book to hold, with lovely paper and a good-sized font.

I like how the author “talks” to the reader and explains things so well. It's a must read for anyone with breast cancer. Although American, so some experiences, treatments, or drugs may differ from those in the UK, the approach is friendly, realistic, and empathetic. Written with warmth, humour, and honesty, it hides nothing, yet shows understanding. It's like reading and being hugged at the same time.

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (August 2017)

Although the author is American, her experiences were close to my own. It is not a factual book, it is about her experiences, from diagnosis to the end of treatment. It's a humorous look at treatment for breast cancer. It is logical and easy to read, in colloquial language with no technical terms. The cover is eye catching but the paper could be better. I like that it describes one person's experience of getting through breast cancer and helps with thoughts and feelings when coping with breast cancer.

Living with breast cancer (46-55) (August 2017)

The author, Andrea Hutton, is diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 41, and subsequently has a mastectomy (with no reconstructive surgery), chemotherapy and radiotherapy. She describes her experiences from the outset of this diagnosis, exploring her feelings, and explaining the treatments and various appointments (and the agony of waiting in between appointments). She draws together her knowledge and what she has learned to compile a useful list of tips at the end of each chapter, covering most elements of the chapter's theme. She is generous with her information, and much can be learned. However, it must be borne in mind that Andrea lived in Seattle and Santa Barbara and the American healthcare system is different in many ways from what could be experienced elsewhere. The principles are similar – but the ways in which treatment is organised are different. Andrea also gives brand names of useful items and drugs that are unfamiliar to a British reader.

It is a standard-size paperback made of paper that resembles blotting paper, with rough edges. The nature of this paper is such that, several times, I turned over two pages at a time. The typeface is easy to read. The title gives the impression that the book is more superficial than it is.

It is very easy to understand. Andrea has a witty, warm, and engaging writing style. However, she pulls no punches in her description of some of the procedures that she undergoes. This could be very helpful to the reader; on the other hand, the reader's treatment may not have the same effect and the descriptions of pain and discomfort could be frightening for those about to undergo treatment. It all depends on whether the reader wishes to know the unpleasant things that could happen – or not. Andrea has several bad reactions to some chemotherapy drugs, for example, and these create very serious side effects until fully addressed. To know that a tattoo (prior to radiotherapy) is very painful is not what people would necessarily expect, and would not be that helpful to anticipate. She also goes into some detail about feeling ugly – with her scars and hair-loss – and describes becoming an angry steroid-monster. Again, this could be worrying for readers. So, although this is beautifully written, and very informative, it is important for the reader to remember that individual experiences vary considerably – one's own experiences of breast cancer may not match or even closely resemble those of the author.

I might recommend it, it depends! I warmed very much to the author. She has a quirky, witty, and bright attitude to her life and experiences generally. She is generous with information and tips for readers who are about to undergo what she has been through. However, everyone's experience of cancer and its treatment is unique and what the author describes may not resonate with what the reader is experiencing. I suspect that some readers may be upset to read about the painful procedures she describes. She is very explicit about the discomfort and pain she experienced, from treatment itself, and psychologically, after feeling ugly after her surgery and hair loss. This may not be what readers will want to read about.

Friend, carer, former health professional (56-65) (August 2017)

This book is warm, practical, and full of useful tips given in an amusing way, which most people will relate to. It is very useful for emotional support and best for a newly diagnosed patient. It is very easy to understand and flows well. It feels a little flimsy but the size is good and it is easy to handle. The paper quality is not great but the cover is good and the photograph of the author inside the back cover is inspirational and shows how you can, and will, be you again after the experience is over.

The introduction describes very well the feelings and thoughts I, and many people I have spoken to since, had on first discovering I had cancer. Just reading this alone would help patients to feel they are not alone and a carer to understand what is happening to the person they love. At the end of each chapter is a Top Tips section which will prove useful to most people. I wasn't keen on some of the descriptions of side effects, especially as the author stated they were rare. Although this was part of her experience, it may scare people already fearful of what is going to happen.

It's an uplifting story of how the author coped with her experience. Although written for an American audience and British women will not relate to some experiences, it is a book that would help anyone newly diagnosed and I wish I had found it at the time.

Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (June 2017)

This is a very well-written, realistic, down-to-earth account. The author is open, self-forgiving, and describes what has happened and what may happen. It is inspiring.

The book is well made with a strong cover and an appealing photo of Andrea on the rear endpaper. Otherwise there are no illustrations. The typefaces, one for plain text and one for the many lists of Top Tips, are easy to read. The tone is encouraging, and she can really write; I'm not joking, it is hard to put down. The language is easy to understand. However, each drug has a generic/scientific name and manufacturer's name. Andrea uses the manufacturer's name and there is no glossary, a mistake.

The American healthcare system is so different that it is easy to think the descriptions are irrelevant for us. Americans have more choice, but they must research a difficult, frightening subject in detail to make sensible decisions at a point when they feel at their worst. At my stage of the journey, this is interesting but unenviable.

It's refreshing to read this relatively gripping account full of one person's observations with open descriptions and no blame attached to difficult behaviour. I will probably recommend it; I was very disturbed in my thinking for at least a year after diagnosis. Now I am glad to be forgiven for that behaviour, but I don't know if I would have found this book helpful earlier on. I still feel doubts about my feelings, which Andrea succeeded in diminishing with her very comforting acceptance of bad feelings, marked lack of any blame and wise advice. One star lost for an American account and no glossary or note of official drug names.

Feeling well five years after breast cancer diagnosis (Over 75) (May 2017)

This is a very practical and honest account of the author's experience and will be a good read for anyone. It really tackles the emotional side of breast cancer and how you might feel at the various stages. It's important to understand how a patient or relative can feel mentally, as well as physically; the psychological effects of cancer and its treatments are huge.

The author explains everything in detail so it is very easy to understand. It goes through the various stages in the order they happen. The book itself is appealing, with a classic, yet simple, design on the front. The pages are roughly cut. I think this is part of the design but I'm not sure; at first I thought it hadn't been finished properly.

I like that the author writes as though talking to a friend and covers issues that doctors may not. The chapter hair loss is brilliant; it can be a huge issue – it was for my Mum – so a little humour whilst embracing the emotional side is great. There is too much detail on occasion, which may worry someone in the early stages of cancer; for those that want a frank and detailed account, this will be a positive. I would prefer shorter tips at the end of each chapter, but again there is a lot of detail throughout and the tips themselves are helpful.

I will pass this book to my Mum to read but I will give her the heads up that it is very detailed as she is only half way through her treatment.

Mum has breast cancer, dad has oesophageal cancer (46-55) (February 2017)

This book helps you to understand what a patient with breast cancer may feel and how a little bit of humour is good for the soul. It is very easy to understand and follow and has a lot of humour. It is beautifully presented and the paper is lovely. It is a beautifully written book that warms you to the author and her journey.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (September 2016)



Although I underwent treatment four years ago, I still found this to be generally an interesting read, although some parts may be unsettling. The author also mentions how her husband and children felt at the time, as she underwent treatment, and this may be helpful for others in that situation. In some senses, it would be best at the start of treatment, but if you read it prior to starting chemotherapy, you might get really down-hearted with the emphasis on how terrible baldness is.

The subjects are tackled in the order in which the author experienced them, but of course, this can be different for everyone. It would be a good book to 'dip into' at various stages of your treatment. The author is American and her experience is vastly different from that of patients in the UK. We generally don't get to choose our surgeons or oncologists, let alone lab staff. Some terminology is different, but it is an easy guess that 'Radiation' is what we call 'Radiotherapy', for example.

I like the cover. It is simple and appealing. I'm not over fond of the layout though. The book is divided into chapters, but individual chapters are quite long, and there isn't necessarily a clear definitive gap between them, apart from the word 'Chapter'. The Top Tips part is very useful, but it would be helpful to have a gap of a page or so before the next piece of text. It may put people off and be a bit daunting, especially if you are exhausted or suffering from chemo-fog.

I suppose I should have guessed from the title, but there does seem to be a general feeling that baldness is the worst part of chemotherapy. I found myself squirming at the odd piece of text, for example: 'those stubs do more to make you look more normal' (p. 131); and 'Not as much as being bald – I mean that's *really* disturbing' (p.137). I appreciate that it's the theme of this book but I found the pure emphasis on appearance a bit galling. Surely, recovering and surviving is more important?

I'd love to give this book a higher rating, as it has been written to aid those in a similar situation, but I found the emphasis on appearance upsetting. It would certainly have depressed me if I'd read it at the start of treatment. If you don't take the emphasis on appearance too seriously, it's a pleasurable, light-hearted read. I like the author's humour, and her down-to-earth approach. It's an easier read as you reach the end of treatment. I'd have felt so down-hearted if I'd read it at the start of chemotherapy (I had chemo before surgery).

Treated for primary stage/grade 3 breast cancer in 2013 (chemotherapy, mastectomy, and radiotherapy). Reconstruction 2015, still taking tamoxifen (46-55) (March 2017)

This book would be useful for someone living with breast cancer or someone caring for them. It gives clear explanations of what one can expect on the cancer journey.

The cover is a good design, but the paper feels cheap. The pages are fiddly to turn; at times, they stuck together and they look as if they haven't been cut straight.

I like the openness of the author but although her book is very easy to understand it didn't have the same impact that other books have had. It didn't grip me and I found myself skipping certain pages.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (February 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

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