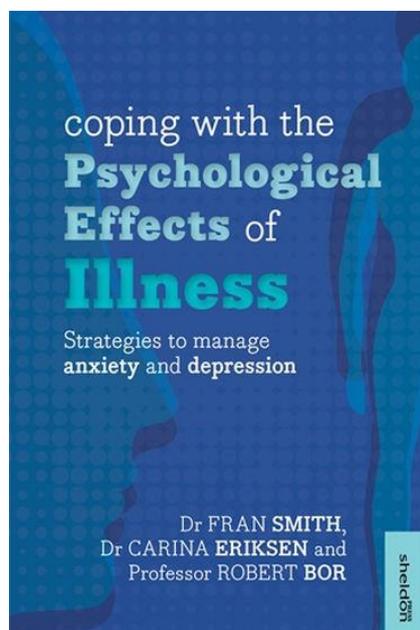


**MACMILLAN  
CANCER SUPPORT**

# BOOK REVIEWS

**Read what people affected by cancer think about...**



**Coping with the psychological effects of illness: strategies to manage anxiety and depression (2015)**

Smith F, Eriksen C, Bor R.  
London: Sheldon Press, 2015.  
120pp.  
ISBN 9781847093431.

**Average star rating 4.1 (out of 5)**

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This is a useful book for anyone struggling to cope with their illness. It would be particularly useful for people who have completed cancer treatment and are struggling to move forward – a well-recognised and difficult period of adjustment. It is not cancer specific but demonstrates the impacts of illness and ways to manage anxiety and depression regardless of the type of illness. There is also a short chapter specifically for relatives/friends who may be struggling to understand their family member or friend's reaction to illness and inability to cope.

There is a logical flow throughout the book, starting with a useful introduction and overview, the content of which is expanded as the book progresses. The author covers how we cope with illness, the physical and emotional symptoms of illness, and ways to manage anxiety, depression and self-esteem in the context of illness. This is followed by a chapter on how to talk to family/friends and getting the most out of your medical team and finishes with a chapter on “what to do if this book is not enough”. This final chapter acknowledges the need for professional help for some people if the self-help strategies are not enough to facilitate acceptance and make changes to cope better with their illness. I questioned whether the final chapter would have been better placed at the beginning of the book as some people struggling to cope may give up before reaching the final chapter. Perhaps the author could have given further support to this during the introduction and overview of each chapter.

It is easy to read, with very little jargon. Each new topic or strategy is well explained. The author uses case studies to demonstrate issues of significance with which the reader is likely to identify, negating thoughts of “I should be able to...” or “I shouldn't have...” and normalising their experience in the context of their illness. It is well presented. The cover clearly demonstrates the nature of the book and the contents page is clear. The typeface and font is standard and therefore an easy read. The tone is one of nurture and empowerment by providing the facts of what is happening, why it may be happening, and how you may want to respond. The different options help the reader to find what works best for them. The author also signposts to other resources and services if this book is not enough.

I enjoyed reading this book from cover to cover. I really like the explanations to help the reader understand what is happening to him/her. This is hugely important and especially for those affected by cancer where there is so much fear and uncertainty. I viewed the book as offering additional tools to add to a person's existing toolbox,

which may just help someone to cope 'differently' with aspects of their illness. It gives hope, and even permission, for the reader to live as well as possible even through illness, and even if "the book is not enough". I'm struggling to find something I dislike about this book. I think it would be difficult for a reader to talk themselves through the mindfulness-based breathing exercise; to receive the most from this exercise, it would need to be on a CD or read by another person.

Overall, a relatively simple and short book filled with informative facts about the impact of illness on our psychological wellbeing followed by different coping strategies to help us live as well as possible alongside illness. I recommend it to anyone with a chronic/long-term illness who begins to experience stress, anxiety, or depression. It is particularly useful for anyone diagnosed with cancer and probably best read early their cancer journey for how their illness may affect their emotional wellbeing. It may prevent anxiety and depression from developing by understanding how illness can affect day-to-day psychological functioning.

### **Health information professional (46-55) (October 2018)**

This book has something for everyone – patient, carer, family member, friend, health professional. It contains very useful strategies on how to manage feelings and emotions whilst living with serious illness. The language is aimed at the layperson – you need no technical knowledge – and the layout is reader friendly, with short paragraphs and chapters and easy to understand tables and graphics.

I love the style of the book and how easy it is to read. I like how the subject is approached from every angle and how the stories help to relate it to everyday life. It's such a useful tool to help anyone who has, or who is caring for someone with, a serious illness, and provides clear, factual explanations that are easy to digest and very helpful. I really recommend this to individuals who have a sick person in their life; it will help them to see their perspective and to offer helpful support.

### **Relative of cancer patient (46-55) (June 2018)**

This book is most useful for the acute and chronic psychological impact of illness on the patient and those around them, but would be useful even for those not affected in some way by illness. It is divided into useful chapters that follow the course of an illness and how we cope with it. The topic is covered in a way that most people would be able to use. It is written in a very matter-of-fact, yet compassionate way.

The author covers a very wide subject concisely, with case studies and useful information and techniques. Very effective use is made of case studies, to demonstrate how various techniques can be used.

I needed to read it in small sections, as there is a lot to take in but it's rare to find a book dealing with such a huge subject that provides useful information in a format that is readable for most people. The typeface may be a bit small for some.

### **Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (June 2018)**

This book acknowledges that anxiety and depression are normal responses to a serious diagnosis such as cancer. It draws on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and mindfulness to outline strategies to improve your coping and reduce the negative impact of these psychological difficulties on your life. It includes examples of a range of illnesses, such as cancer, stroke, heart disease, migraine, diabetes, HIV, MS, erectile dysfunction, Parkinson's disease and chronic fatigue. It includes exercises to identify and challenge unhelpful health beliefs and self-critical thinking, improve self-esteem and learn to relax using mindfulness. It is therefore most useful for anyone struggling to cope with the psychological effects of illness or those supporting them.

It starts by outlining why psychological difficulties arise and moves on to strategies to better manage them. There are chapters on how to talk to friends and family, get the most out of your relationship with your healthcare team, and support a loved one. The final chapter has advice for those still struggling. I didn't notice any errors, but on page 93 the authors assume that the person being supported is female. They try hard not to assign a gender to different roles elsewhere so this oversight stands out.

It is small, relatively short, and easy to carry around, which makes it more accessible. The plain, understated cover supports the textbook feel of the subject. The paper is good quality and the typeface easy to read. Examples of how people in different situations may characterise the problems discussed are in italics to set them apart from the theory based text. The authors obviously have a wealth of experience and their tone clearly demonstrates this. The overall tone is one of wanting to help people cope better while understanding the common barriers to achieving this. The clear language makes it accessible to all readers. Mindfulness and CBT are introduced and explained in the first chapter, which aids understanding later. The term 'illness' is used throughout (despite acknowledgement of the stigma associated with it) in a bid to ensure the book is easily understood. The authors define what they are referring to when they use the term 'depression' at the start of the chapter on depression.

The book gives you back control and shows you that there is a lot you can do to improve how you respond to your health issues. Each strategy is listed step by step so you can easily follow it and apply it to your situation. The questions to help you challenge unhelpful health beliefs and self-critical thinking are simple but effective in giving you some perspective on the issues affecting you. The book tries to reassure you that what you are feeling is natural but acknowledges that no two people will respond in the same way – it is a case of finding the techniques that work best for you. It also makes it clear that good coping means being open to the support of others. The chapter on managing self-esteem in the context of illness is invaluable. Each chapter has an overview and summary, making it easier to digest, and the introduction allows you to jump to certain bits that may be more useful.

Because the book is heavily influenced by psychological theory, it can be heavy going at times. It tries to present a generalised view of illness and the common psychological effects this can cause, but loses specific insight into these very different illnesses. The psychological slant also means that everything is a problem with a solution, which some readers may find simplistic. In the section on addressing over-vigilance, no strategies are discussed other than to see your doctor. This seems like a common problem for people who are diagnosed with a serious illness such as cancer and the book would have benefitted from more techniques here.

Overall, a very useful book for those struggling to cope with the psychological effects of illness. It is designed as a self-help resource to help you identify your problems and work towards resolving them. The strategies are very useful in reducing the negative effects of the naturally strong emotions that illness can evoke. My cancer experience involved huge amounts of anxiety, depression, uncertainty, worry and low self-esteem. If I had known about these techniques at the time, and they had reduced the impact even slightly, I would have been very grateful. I wish I had been aware of this book immediately after being diagnosed as I feel it would have helped me manage better some of my strong emotions. It is written in a very positive light in that it puts the control back into your hands and shows you how much you can do to improve how you respond to your health issues. Despite being a self-help book, it also discusses the need for professional help in certain circumstances. All in all, it's a very well presented handbook that has the potential to help a lot of people.

### **Cured of cervical cancer (26-35) (May 2018)**

As the title suggests, this book deals with psychological effects of illness, such as anxiety and depression. It offers explanations as to why patients may be susceptible to these feelings and practical suggestions to help them come to terms with how to live their life in as fulfilling a manner as possible. It is written by counselling psychologists and seems to be aimed mainly at patients but the professional, matter-of-fact and warm manner make it suitable for anyone. Chapter 10 (p. 93) specifically deals with how to support a friend, partner or family member who is ill.

The authors start with an introduction to illness and emotion, common factors in dealing with illness and conditions, and the factors affecting how we deal with illness, and then move on to how to manage anxiety, self-esteem, depression. Later chapters discuss how to talk to friends and family, how to get the most out of your medical team and the book ends with a chapter on "what to do if this book is not enough". The chapters follow a logical order but each can be read on its own.

The book is thoroughly and professionally written and I did not notice any factual inaccuracies. The chapters are not overwhelming and the text is not technical; rather it is written clearly for everyone to understand. The ideas and suggestions are clearly explained. There isn't a glossary, but there are a couple of references and suggested further reading. A list of mental health charities or suggestions of where to look for a professional counsellor may be a useful addition. The cover does give the book a serious appearance but strikes the right note between not too jolly and academic and is not unappealing. The book is not overlong and small and light enough to fit in a bag for a commute. The general layout is easy to read with the list or illustration. The case studies are in a different typeface from the main text and stand out easily.

I offered to review this book because of the title and the subject matter – I have not seen too many books for patients on the psychological aspects of illness. I like the very practical suggestions on how to deal with depression; the authors first describe a list of why a patient may become increasingly anxious or depressed and then focus on each aspect and how to improve the situation. For example, in Chapter 6, common factors for the 'maintenance' of depression are reduced activity, negative thinking and rumination, and giving up hope. The chapter then describes how to

increase structure and routine in each day, how to focus on pleasure and achievement, no matter how small each seems, and how to challenge negative thoughts, and includes steps for problem solving. It emphasises that each small step you take can lead to a big difference in mood. I also like the case studies that are used to illustrate points throughout; it stops the book becoming dry and unrelatable.

This is a very useful book that addresses common thoughts and worries. It offers helpful, practical suggestions for when you are struggling and is written in a warm, not overbearing way. The case studies illustrate the points well. The authors are obviously experienced professionals and cover the subject thoroughly and with empathy. I like the fact it discusses difficult points, such as "when does being vigilant become over-vigilant and a source of excessive worry that can intensify the sense of bodily symptoms and cause a person intense feelings of stress and anxiety?" (p. 45). The nature and purpose of worries is discussed and there are practical exercises, none of them difficult. I also like the useful suggestions in Chapter 9 that offer help to get the most out of consultations with professionals. Chapter 10 has suggestions for friends and family, a difficult subject because everyone is different. I appreciate the last chapter, which seems to go further than other similar titles, discussing reasons why progress may be slow and motivational problems, surely a big factor. It offers hope for people who are struggling emotionally with their illness. I will keep it on my shelf to refer to when I need to challenge my negative thinking with practical steps.

#### **Uterine cancer survivor (46-55) (May 2018)**

An optimistic mental outlook can have a significant impact on nearly every aspect of our life and health. This book aims to give us back some control when treatment often denies such control. It provides strategies and helpful suggestions to help us cope after a life-changing diagnosis. It shows that serious or chronic illness can have a significant and devastating physiological impact on patients and damaging consequences for family and friends. The short chapters can be read in order or delved into as needed. It is easy to understand without too much jargon.

The book tackles our beliefs, e.g. our health beliefs, and attitudes to an illness. Each chapter has a couple of case studies. One shows how negative beliefs also impact life in a detrimental way and hinder us in living life to the full given the circumstances. On the other hand, a second case study shows how a patient with a positive outlook is much better able to cope with life and their family and friends. I found these highly plausible examples particularly useful because they show in practical terms how our beliefs have a fundamental role to play in how we can live life after a diagnosis.

It also provides practical ideas on how we can question ourselves to find out where and how we can start making changes. The strategies are always practical and logical but the book also shows that any changes will depend on the individual and their attitudes and personalities. Whilst it shows how small changes can have a huge impact on life, be it for the patient, family members or friends, it also stresses that we should be tolerant and patient if we cannot immediately achieve what we set out to do. It advocates not losing faith in the process but continuing to take small steps.

#### **Colon cancer/melanoma carer (56-65) (April 2018)**

This has incredibly useful information on how to cope with the symptoms and effects of a wide range of diseases. The focus is not on cancer, but on the psychological issues that may be caused by illness. It presents multiple techniques for challenging your conceptions and prejudices, as well as addressing anxiety and depression, which are frequent in people with cancer.

The content is structured well in eleven short chapters, starting with an overview of the typology of medical conditions, the factors that affect how patients cope with illness, and managing the most frequently seen symptoms, before addressing anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, relationships with medical staff, family, and friends, and how best to support a dear one who is seriously ill. The language is accessible and there's a lot of practical advice and case studies. The cover is quite attractive, and the paper is high quality. It is easy to read, the font is adequate, and the book fits into my purse successfully.

I like that it is quite comprehensive, covering the most important psychological issues caused by chronic or terminal diseases, with practical advice on how to address them. It is full of tips and real-life scenarios, which make it easy to follow and very practical. Although the main part is for the patient, it has a chapter for carers, family and friends, with valuable guidance on how to help loved ones cope.

**Relative and friend of several people with cancer (breast, pancreatic, ovarian, liver) (26-35) (April 2018)**



Hurrah! A book that not only explains the principles and concepts of the psychological effects of illness, but explains and describes how these physical and emotional issues interact and possible consequences. It describes this interaction in the patient and how it can affect family, friends, or carers and may improve awareness, knowledge and understanding of aspects rarely described in detail.

It has comprehensible explanations of anxiety, depression, and self-esteem, and how these can develop with the onset of illness. The authors list some of the symptoms and associated behavioural patterns, empowering readers to recognise these in themselves and others. The self-help exercises could help readers manage their difficulties, or support others. It provides a greater understanding and appreciation of the interaction between physical health status and psychological health and the impact this can have not only on the patient's ability to cope, but also on their support network. It explains how deliberately choosing to change a thought pattern can result in an improvement in coping with or managing their condition. It also gives advice on obvious and not-so-obvious ways to support someone who is ill. The authors reassure us that it is not realistic to expect a patient to cope physically or emotionally on their own, and that it is normal, acceptable, and necessary to ask for help.

There are useful guidelines to help newly diagnosed readers tell family and friends, and the authors suggests some of the possible reactions. This helps prepare the ill reader, and is appropriate for a variety of conditions. Healthcare practitioners may

benefit from an insight into the psychological impact of being unwell on the individual and their support network. The good explanations of the principles behind empathy and compassion may be beneficial to their professional knowledge and development. Uniquely, it also concerns itself with the often-neglected needs of a patient's support network. It suggests a "life balance" diary so that anyone in a caring role can identify and address their needs. Chapter 10 advises carers how they can help, support and encourage someone who is ill, but acknowledges the strain of caring for an unwell person. There is advice on how carers can take care of themselves emotionally and physically, and reassurance that this is permissible and necessary.

The tone is kind and supportive providing compassion, reassurance and hope. Specifically, it offers reassurance that it is normal to experience unwelcome "rollercoaster" emotions in response to being acutely or chronically ill. It suggests using a symptoms diary, enabling readers to identify links between their physical symptoms and emotions, and advises that by managing their physical symptoms they can realistically expect an improvement in their emotions. Suggestions of coping strategies are given in addition to step-by-step instructions of relaxation techniques for mind and body. However, readers are informed not to expect instant success. These are skills that need to be learned, requiring discipline, commitment, time and patience to master. The authors describe a variety of psychological concerns that could be sensitive but their gentle recommendation and reassurance may enable readers to discuss it with their medical team and get help. A section explains the causes of fatigue and how to manage it and there are general tips on what people can do to help themselves, and the professional and social support they can access to help them manage and cope when confronted with serious health difficulties.

Chapter 9 has some useful suggestions as to how readers can get the most benefit out of consultations with their medical team, and suggests questions to ask. So, in addition to providing practical solutions, suggestions, self-help exercises and psychological support, this book may empower readers to feel more in control of their illness and treatment. Those who have completed treatment, or who are having regular check-ups, may also benefit as they adjust and cope with life post cancer.

Each chapter stands alone and readers read the book from cover to cover or use the overview at the beginning to find a relevant chapter. If readers are advised to refer to an earlier chapter, there are clear directions. The index is useful for accessing information later. To get most benefit, read it from start to finish, taking your time, reflecting, and noting page numbers of helpful information or strategies as you read. I noted one error, of little significance: a definition of insanity (p. 101) that is often attributed to Einstein, "Doing the same thing over and over again...". I found many sources that state that Einstein is unlikely to have defined insanity in such terms.

The language is easy to understand and terms and abbreviations are explained as they appear, but the principles and concepts are sometimes a challenge – there is a lot of complex information in a short space. It is not a fast read, it requires patience, concentration and frequent breaks to understand. Readers also need time to reflect on how the advice may be applied. Some chapters resemble a "workbook", with exercises that the reader could benefit from immediately. Other coping strategies, e.g. relaxing mind and body, mindfulness, and CBT, require time to learn, practice,

and master before benefits result. Also, readers may have to master a combination of these coping skills before their application provides relief from their problems.

The cover isn't appealing, but the clear bold title of a frequently experienced, but rarely explained subject matter did catch my eye. The professional status of the authors, and the fact that the book is on a prescription reading list did appeal to me – I felt confident that what I was about to read would be correct. However, the greatest draw is the subtitle, which provides hope for coping with two debilitating conditions. This was reinforced by the summary on the back. It is possibly too large to slip into a pocket, but sufficiently light to carry in a bag when out and about. The paper is good quality and the typeface is clear, but some readers may find the print too small. It has a typical formal layout, i.e. forward, contents, text, references, further reading, and index. It is well presented with clear divisions between the different chapters and bold sub-divisions within these. However, there is little space between paragraphs and this, in combination with the small type, may put off some readers. There are no photographs, but a few diagrams and tables help explain the text.

I like this book because it is well written, informative, interesting, and stimulates personal reflection. It is consistently non-judgmental and supportive in tone, which encourages the reader to treat themselves kindly and practice self-compassion when dealing with any problems. It also highlights the advantages of sharing concerns with others and the negative effects of isolation and self-criticism on mental, and consequently physical, wellbeing. The professional author's acknowledgement that the psychological effects of illness can be just as intolerable as the physical, will reassure readers that they are not alone in their experience. A pearl of wisdom for any reader is that it is better to think of "success" as an improvement and not a total cure, or 100% ability to cope. This gem of information would benefit anyone.

The authors are honest when informing readers that identifying and mastering CBT and mindfulness coping strategies for their emotional wellbeing will take some time. Readers are advised to seek professional help if the suggested coping techniques are ineffective. This reassures readers that they may need professional assistance to acquire them, or that it may not be appropriate or possible for all to master them. There is a useful chapter on how those in a supporting role can identify and best assist a patient; this would be beneficial to both reader groups. However, I was most impressed by the inclusion in this section of advice on how those in a supporting or caring role could look after themselves. This is rarely found in books concentrating on physical health conditions, and in addition to being practically useful, it shows support, compassion, understanding and empathy to readers in this role.

I also like the detailed introduction and overview in which the authors give a summary of each chapter. This not only gives the reader a preview of the content and structure of the text, but could also be used to find specific information or advice. The index makes the book a valuable reference source at future dates. Usefully the book includes recommended internet sources for more information or help, but just as importantly warns them about non-professionally recognised sites.

This book initially appears quite useful. It introduces and explains complex principles well, and it makes some suggestions and gives advice that can be applied immediately. If the CBT and mindfulness techniques are effective once mastered,

then it will be extremely useful, and could be included on the reading list of every new patient, relative, and trainee health care practitioner. If I had evidence that CBT and mindfulness were effective as coping strategies I would probably recommend it.

I have a couple of concerns about how useful it will be. It is a very complex book to understand. It takes time to read and digest, and some chapters include “workbook” exercises to tackle before application. This may be too challenging for someone who is tired, short of time, anxious, emotionally distressed, or in a distracting environment, e.g. awaiting results of an investigation, or waiting to be called for an appointment. Readers may need an appropriately trained health practitioner to help them grasp and explore the concepts, teach them coping skills, and offer support and guidance in applying them. This type of specialist professional help is not always available or readily accessible. However, it is an interesting read, introducing and explaining some profound concepts, written by appropriately qualified professionals and with a useful overview and index. Definitely one to keep for future reference.

### **Recovered from myxoidliposarcoma (46-55) (June 2018)**

This is suitable for anyone with any medical diagnosis or mental health condition. It includes useful tips for all aspects of a medical diagnosis, from the initial processing of the diagnosis, through preparing mentally for treatment and discussing the diagnosis with others, to coping with the uncertainty of prognosis.

The topic is handled in a logical order. From my experience of having had cognitive behavioural therapy, everything seems accurate. It is easy to understand, although there are perhaps too many buzzwords. Without the examples and scenarios, it may have come across as insincere, but it regains its credibility with real-life examples. It looks more like a textbook than a self-help book. The typeface and internal layout is fine to understand and case studies are in a different font from the main text.

I like that the authors have set about discussing the topic of mental health and physical diagnosis. There is a big overlap between the two. They give examples of situations where challenging thoughts can have negative impacts on physical health and give tips and skills to manage this thinking and show the possible outcomes. However, it may come across as a bit insincere and a quick fix for all mental health problems. Readers should exercise caution; behavioural treatments do not work for everyone and they take time and patience.

### **Employee and volunteer at a blood cancer charity (26-35) (April 2018)**

Anyone with any illness could use this book at any stage from initial diagnosis. It's a short book and can't go into detail, especially as each person's case is different, but it gives good advice and exercises for CBT and mindfulness. Some of the early chapters are repetitive and use vague terms, e.g. this will depend on your age, gender, diet. This is common sense to me – even a simple headache depends on these things – but this is reiterated several times.

### **Macmillan Volunteer (56-65) (April 2018)**

This is a universal book for a wide audience. It is not aimed just at cancer patients, it is useful for anyone with any illness. As well as covering psychological theories, the authors use case studies to enhance the information and incorporate self-help strategies for the reader to implement. They encourage you to make small, positive changes to improve mental wellbeing.

It is easy to read. The content is condensed into small chapters that can be read in any order – one to dip into and refer to. There is no glossary, but it is aimed at the layman and so it is not full of technical jargon. There is an index and a few references for further reading. The typeface is reasonable but, apart from some bullet points, there are no illustrations to break up the text.

### **Health care professional (46-55) (March 2018)**

This book talks in detail about what is classed as disease, chronic or acute, and the emotional and physical challenges one faces after diagnosis. It provides practical methods and applications, such as CBT and mindfulness, that patients can undertake to help them manage these feelings and work towards changes that make a difference to overall health. The detailed technical information is explained thoroughly but it could be overwhelming to try to take it all in. It may be better for a carer or relative to read and then advise the patient about helpful techniques.

It is a compact book with a lot of relevant information. The short chapters flow in a logical manner and should be read from start to finish as each chapter builds on previous knowledge and information. There are many case studies and a lot of information in bullet form. The text could have been bigger to make it easier on the eyes. It reads like a textbook and the language is slightly technical but the authors explain what each term means. I found it easy to understand but I have studied psychology; it would have been more helpful to have information presented in tables or illustrations with a summary at the end of each chapter to check that the reader has understood it. The tone has an academic feel, much like listening to a lecturer and it gives a professional point of view and advice about handling issues.

Overall, it is a good read with lots of information and facts based on research and evidence. It does not provide information on specific cancers or treatment options, rather it talks of methods to help readers understand the feelings a difficult diagnosis might cause, such as anxiety and depression. Someone who takes the time to read it carefully could gain many insights about how to manage their symptoms better. The case studies allow the reader to get an idea of how people of varying ages and circumstances all feel anxiety and/or depression and how they handle this.

If you are looking for something that can explain why you experience worry and anxiety, then this is a helpful book. However, it can feel overwhelming, especially as it is trying to address emotional concerns; it can feel as if a patient who is not getting better is not trying these methods to help themselves, or indeed seek help. It is useful for health professionals to understand how patients feel and for carers and relatives who want to understand better how to provide support.

### **Soft tissue sarcoma patient (March 2018)**

My first impression was that this book looked very medical. I did not like the cover – it looks overly medical – and the fact that the authors are two doctors and a professor suggest that it will not be written in language that will persuade the ordinary person to delve further. However, I could not have been more wrong. It is well-thought-out and sympathetically written and everything is explained well. It focuses very much on the emotional side of illness and looks at managing depression and anxiety. It gives you exercises based on mindfulness, and relaxation techniques to help with coping. It also helps identify issues in the home and family that may be adding to the problem. There is a useful section for friends/family on how best to support someone who is ill.

I highly recommend this book and would go so far as to say that it should be widely available!

### **Womb cancer survivor (56-65) (March 2018)**

This book can help anyone living with a condition, or someone in their close circle, at any stage of illness. The focus is about coping with an illness, but the exercises could be applied to feelings of depression and anxiety for other situations in our busy lives.

It flows well and you can read it in order (as I did), or, as suggested, dip into sections that feel relevant at the time. Despite the elements relating to psychology and research, I never felt that it was too complex or laden with jargon. This was described as a clear goal for the authors: to make the book simple, easy to understand, and practical. It is a manageable size to hold and has a quality feel overall, with high quality paper. Some readers may find the font small but I was not put off by this.

The authors manage to convey scientific material and research in a simple and easy to read format. It is not complex and does not bamboozle with medical terms. What I also appreciate is that they use examples and case studies to show how each issue, such as anxiety, is approached and dealt with. On top of this, there are practical exercises to help us analyse a problem and take simple steps to change the way we think about something, such as our beliefs about illness. There are clear descriptions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Mindfulness and how both can be used to overcome or ease the common psychological effects of coping with illness. It is an excellent starting point for anyone to give the exercises a go without this feeling overwhelming. The final chapter does suggest that we cannot go on a challenging journey alone and that support can, and should, be sought where needed. Some might find it simplistic and want to delve into more detail, but there are other sources (as suggested by the authors in the reference section at the back of the book).

### **Father died from abdominal cancer (36-45) (February 2018)**

As any cancer patient will know, a cancer diagnosis starts an emotional journey that can never be explained until one experiences it. This book can help all to understand these emotions and to a certain degree how to deal with them. It gives a good insight into the mental issues that cancer diagnosis and treatment causes. It's well written and very easy to read and understand. It's a basic looking book with no glossy photos or the like.

A useful book for anyone affected by serious illness and those who care for them. It highlights the psychological effects that serious illness has on anyone affected. It's also a valuable tool for carers and close family as it's often very difficult for them to understand the constant mood changes that patients may experience through a mix of emotions.

### **Colorectal cancer patient in remission (56-65) (January 2018)**



I began this book with hope because of my personal situation. However, I did not find much of it useful. The emphasis is on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and that hasn't worked for me. However, I'm sure it could be a useful tool for many people faced with depression and/or other psychological effects of a long-term illness.

It is a nice slim volume, set out well, with clear headings and subheadings, and it is easy to access, either to read from cover to cover or to select specific chapters. Tables illustrate some ideas and case studies are used as positive examples of overcoming negative thoughts and feelings. It is very easy to understand with appropriate language that the lay person can grasp.

As a self-help book, it is a clear guide to specific practices that people could use to ease depression and other psychological difficulties due to a long-term illness and it doesn't offer magic-wand solutions. The authors recognise that the book may not be enough. This I like as it addresses the issue that it is sometimes difficult to get "well" because of other, more complex, circumstances.

### **Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (February 2018)**

This is intended to be a self-help book to help people understand how their feelings could be affected by a physical illness. It offers techniques for overcoming the anxiety, depression and low self-esteem that can occur alongside a diagnosis of physical illness. It would be of interest to anyone who has a diagnosis of serious illness (not specifically cancer). It could also be used as an introductory text for anyone who wants to learn about the topic.

The content is clearly structured, giving a theoretical discussion of types of medical conditions and factors affecting how people cope with illness, before moving on to more practical aspects of managing the different psychological effects of illness.

From its cover design, presentation and layout, this looks like a textbook, although it is relatively short. There are no illustrations. The authors' tone comes across as being well informed and sympathetic, but their language is often needlessly complex. The book does at times read like an academic paper, and the language can be unnecessarily wordy. Technical terms are sometimes used for key concepts, but are explained where they occur.

The book has a reassuring air of academic authority. I like the way that case studies are included to make it more approachable. I am particularly drawn to the exercises using cognitive behaviour therapy techniques that provide the coping strategies promised in the title. However, the practical coping techniques are rather swamped by the academic discussion surrounding them. Having read the book all the way through, there are some sections that I might want to revisit and work through as practical exercises, but I can't easily find them.

There is a definite need for this type of book. With a cancer diagnosis, we do have relatively available psychological support, for example from specialist nurses or organisations like Macmillan Cancer Support, and this book will provide some encouragement to the patient to recognise when they need help and how to ask. For other serious and/or progressive medical conditions, the psychological impact of the illness is not always addressed by the healthcare system. This book provides a reassuring explanation of the potential emotional impacts of illness and what the individual can do to help themselves cope with anxiety, depression and low self-esteem, as well as how to seek professional help. In some circumstances, and for individuals who like to get their information from formal publications, it could be extremely helpful.

I would like to rate the book more highly as it does contain some useful and straightforward techniques for challenging unhelpful thinking about illness and developing effective coping strategies. If these had been presented in a more accessible format, with the exercises separated more clearly from the theoretical content, maybe as worksheets, then the book would have been more effective.

**Former breast cancer patient (46-55) (December 2017)**



I love to read all types of books but really struggled with this one; I had to force myself to pick it up and read it. I found it difficult to engage with; it seems to be more appropriate for practitioners in places, whilst other parts seem over simplified.

Whilst there is an order to the book, at the start a lot of time is spent explaining what the author is going to do rather than doing it. The initial chapters are hard going, which made it difficult to engage with the book and I found the case studies over simplistic and a bit patronising.

The relaxation section is useful but, overall, this is not a book I would recommend. It could be useful for people living with cancer and carers at any point on the cancer journey – it may be more useful after treatment as often there is a great deal going on and a lot of support following diagnosis and during treatment. However, I feel it was written very much as a practitioner guide rather than as a guide for the public.

**Breast cancer patient (46-55) (May 2018)**

There is little doubt, given their qualifications and experience, that the authors are skilled therapists, but I would say this book is not for the depressed patient. The overall impression is one of patronising tone and absolute confidence in the authors' own abilities to help. For the cancer patient's carer, this book needs to be read before the illness takes hold, as a warning of what could happen and how to, potentially, help with the patient's and their own, depression and or anxiety. Most carers are already in a low mood or depressed before they realise they need help. It is however, quite academic, which is fine for me but might not suit everyone.

If the intended audience includes those who, as the title suggests, are 'coping with the psychological effects of illness', the language is not appropriate. The book includes much of what the patient already knows. E.g., 'The medical condition itself may... cause you to be constantly tired, unable to sleep despite deep fatigue...'. The patient does not need to be told how he or she feels, but a carer might well benefit from this information. The final chapter, eleven, pp 99-107 is entitled 'What to do if this book is not enough'. But page 65 concerns those with severe depression or suicidal thoughts. These two sections would be better placed together with early advice for those caring for patients suffering badly mentally and emotionally.

The cover page is purple with various shades of blue and is attractive to me, as someone who is well; presumably the authors have found the colours helpful for patients. The paper is strong rather than the flimsier paper one is used to seeing in a novel. The font however is far too small and the tone is patronising and judgemental; it is not (depressed) reader friendly.

As someone who volunteers with a cancer support charity, I like the fact that there is helpful reading available. I feel there are techniques that would be useful in conjunction with therapy sessions. If low mood is your main problem, then this book might be what you need, provided you can distance yourself enough from your low mood, or, preferably, read it when your mood is level in readiness for a future, perhaps expected, low. However, it is too academic for someone with depression and for whom concentration does not come easily, if at all. Having tried many of the methods in conjunction with therapeutic treatment, I would not like to have tried them alone, with just a book for support. The warning, on page 65, for those suffering with 'severe depression and suicidal thoughts, the authors 'recommend' that they should contact their GP or other professional, '...as soon as possible' is far too late in chapter 6, concerning managing depression, and too late in the book. Also, someone with depression needs instant access information, illustrations with plenty of white space, so there is nothing to overload the depressed mind, with the useful crux of the information in easy to read format and font. The font in this book is too small, the information too difficult for the depressed mind to cope with. Had someone given me this book when I was depressed it would have gone in the bin.

I feel the book would be more suitable for friends and relatives who might be able to introduce some of the techniques sensitively and without judgement. Where cancer is concerned, as a carer and as a volunteer with a cancer charity, huge numbers of people with cancer are very ill and quite likely to be suffering from side effects of treatment including fatigue, nausea and more. The main carer is often extremely tired and struggling to find time for everything in a day, finding the time to read this book would likely be very difficult and again, it would help if the information were instantly

accessible, it is not. Case studies and charting weekly activities would likely overload an already stressed and exhausted body and mind. If the carer or patient could read it when in a calmer phase of the disease, e.g. between treatments and when the prognosis is good, the information would be useful, but not in this patronising, judgemental tone, which, as someone who has suffered from deep depression in the past, would be enough to make me throw the book away. A depressed person does not need a ticking off. Telling the reader (p. 61), that '...it is common to withdraw from others. However, this is very unhelpful', is precisely what I mean. I feel that 'strategies for managing ...depression' is much more complex and, for a depressed person as mentioned earlier, needs to be put in a simpler, instantly accessible form, for example a larger font, illustrations rather than small charts, plenty of white space so that a depressed person does not feel that they are drowning in tiny text and information overload. On p. 99, the reader is informed that, '...since everything...in this book is based on tried-and-tested, well-researched techniques, there will be at least some which are effective for you'. This reads as a get-out clause. It's rather like saying, if you don't get any help from this book it's your own fault.

Cancer is mentioned on p. 101 with chemotherapy and steroids the only mentioned 'medication' and '...a side effect of this medication ... raised heart rate, makes you feel sweaty and agitated and interferes with sleep'. There is no mention of nausea or fatigue, just two of the common distressing side effects. Of course, I do not expect the book to be a treatise on cancer, but I do feel that the authors are expecting too much of the depressed cancer patient. On p. 102, '...if you avoid situations where you can try out the effectiveness of these (methods) and measure your progress, they will remain merely textbook ideas.' Several people where I live have cancer, including my husband, in varying stages. I asked what their response would be to some of the statements in this book (trying to be fair to the book) and the universal reply was that they would feel the authors were 'unreasonable' in their expectations and that the attitude would simply 'add to my depression'.

In conclusion, this book would be useful in conjunction with individual or group therapy and support where long term illness is concerned, *if* the patient has help with putting some of the practices in place. *If* it were in a more accessible format, then the information could be very useful but is unlikely to be helpful in the day-to-day stresses and strains and pain of those trying to cope with the many effects of serious illness with merely a book for guidance.

**Caring for my husband who has prostate cancer and is due to complete treatment in his oesophagus (66-75) (April 2018)**

# 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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