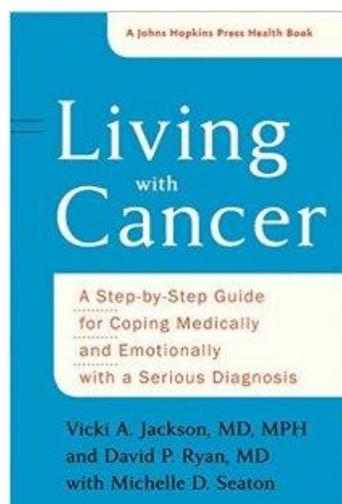


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# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**Living with cancer. A step-by-step guide for coping medically and emotionally with a serious diagnosis (2017)**

Jackson VA, Ryan DP, Seaton MD.  
Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017.  
viii, 334pp.  
ISBN 9781421422336.

**Average star rating 4.4 (out of 5)**

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This is an in-depth, textbook-like almanac, great for a bigger picture of cancer treatment. It is especially useful for patients, relatives, friends, possibly the public, as it is comprehensive and logically organised. It is also full of insight that could be useful to people who are unaware of the situation in which they or their loved ones find themselves. It tackles a wide range of issues from different levels and aspects of care and even though at times it appears to give an unorthodox perspective, it provides plenty of anecdotal examples to justify certain stances. It also gives a good insight into the perspective of medical professionals as well as of the different people with cancer encountered by the author. I would especially emphasise that this book is useful for people with cancer as well as those close to them to gain insight and perspective and hopefully open lines of dialogue and communication.

The book outlines the whole process of treatment from diagnosis to end-of-life care and thoroughly addresses the many concerns of people with cancer and their families. It is comprehensive and especially useful for tackling uncertainty; the scientific/textbook way it presents information is useful for answering queries or at least setting targets to enable the handing of queries. It deals very well with all types of treatment and addresses psychological issues and is therefore useful all round in the context of treatment. As well as this, it offers an insight into addressing problems in ways that may not have been thought of by the patient. It places a large emphasis on breaking isolation and encouraging as much communication as possible.

It is organised logically into three sections, each having structure and addressing separate topics. The sections each address chronologically different periods in the treatment spectrum. The book flows well from topic to topic. It is very thorough and the two authors, who talk about different aspects of the journey, complement each other in building a holistic picture. I did not notice any inaccuracies but there are no sources for the data provided or the information given.

It is easy to understand, and the language is generally appropriate for all audiences. Some parts can be convoluted due to technical treatment details that at times are not clear enough; some visual aids would be useful to help with explanation though most concepts are explained quite clearly. Although few drugs are mentioned they are sufficiently explained in context of the scenarios presented. The book would benefit from a glossary. Some subjects, such as intimacy, may be considered sensitive and hence inappropriate for a younger audience.

The book is appealing, and it does include a few grayscale images. The layout is straightforward and well arranged in an appropriate font. The tone is mainly one of realism; this may be daunting to some, but it is about maintaining a healthy proportionate attitude to treatment and to the time available to patients. The tone reflects the experiences and convictions of the author.

I like the book's thoroughness and detail. I also like the fact that it is divided into clear sections; these divide the topic, building clarity after giving the context of the information. The anecdotes illustrate what they have been talking about and provide a more relatable scenario that opens the reader to certain possibilities and presents these alternative perspectives as viable options. The seamless interchange between the two authors, each providing insight into their specialities, makes the book fluid in a pleasant manner and creates a feeling of continuity. The book's strengths lie in its textbook-like approach to the subject and the logical way it presents information. The insight it provides into the medical professionals' viewpoint is also interesting. Overall, a very beneficial book with a very thorough provision of information and providing an outline for treatment/planning for subsequent eventualities.

It is, at times, content heavy and technical; this is made worse by the lack of a glossary to help readers keep track of key words. The tone of realism, discouraging optimism, may be daunting, but it does serve a purpose – over-optimistic hope can sometimes be destructive. The authors are dismissive of alternative therapies and the lack of citations is also limiting; if readers want more information there are no suggestions for further reading nor any further questions regarding the subject.

I recommend it. It is a useful source of information, provides meaningful insight, and demonstrates the fact that sometimes one's perspective is all that needs to change.

### **Close relative of cancer patients, carer, health care assistant looking after patients with cancer (Under 25) (July 2018)**

This book is most useful for de-mystifying the detail of the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, for example, the types of scans. It is very easy to understand; any complex scenarios are explained stage by stage by the timely use of case studies. The appearance, layout, and tone are appropriate for the subject.

I like how it addresses the medical profession and use of words, for example the range of words that is used when it is suspected you have cancer. An example is suspicious shadow, this is unpacked and explained. I also like how it addresses the side effects of chemo, such as shortness of breath, and when you should be worried and when you should not. Sometimes for me the use of case studies can be a little simplistic i.e. perfectly cooked up to show a point (as did Freud).

This is a very helpful book that one needs on one's bookshelf. I know I will refer to it again and again. I have already lent to someone in shock after her husband's diagnosis and based on knowledge gained, I encouraged her to insist on a scan.

### **Living with bowel cancer (56-65) (May 2018)**

I recommend this step-by-step guidebook to anyone dealing with cancer – patient, family, friend. It is also a basic book for carers, support workers, nurses and doctors. It presents complex information about cancer, its treatment, and coping strategies in a clear, friendly and supportive manner. Cancer changes a lot, but patients can take some control; they just need complex knowledge, which they can find in this book.

It is divided into three sections. The first has general information to help people find their way around this complicated topic. The second covers symptoms, side effects, and medications – essential knowledge for patients and their family. The third deals with the challenge of progressive cancer. The technical aspects of treatment are explained in a simple to understand way. The cover is blue, a symbol of calm and hope, perfectly representing the book's main aim. The paper is pleasant to the touch. There are no photos, but enough diagrams to help explain the text.

I like the order of the book and the language. It does not talk about fighting nor oblige everyone to be optimistic. I was impressed by how the authors have arranged the information so that everyone can find the necessary evidence. At the same time, they give readers the courage to manage problems with medications, appointments, or emotional crisis. The main messages I took are that the patient's well-being is the centre of professionals' concerns – it is possible to achieve a better quality of life. I appreciate statements such as, "Having worked with thousands of patients, I can tell you that the patients who cope best in this new world of cancer treatment are the ones who give up on the notion that they can push cancer away by fighting it, being tough enough, or by enduring treatments and side effects stoically." (p. 99). Patients are not alone in this new, strange world. They can manage their treatment effectively and there is much advice on how to do so. I would give it more stars if possible.

There are many books on cancer, but I recommended this as a first read. I have learned from this book to think about cancer as about any other illness, difficult but possibly curative. That is amazing. The authors do not push any behaviours or "must dos". The advice is to read, understand and choose your options. It is serious but there are many decisions you can make. It does not imply that it is easy to deal with, but there are many more options than 20 years ago. Patients and family must ask questions and make decisions. This book gives hope.

### **Professional carer / Cancer Support Worker (46-55) (January 2018)**

All Macmillan professionals and GPs would do well to be familiar with this book to be able to recommend it to patients: those referred for investigations of a possible cancer; those undergoing investigations and treatment; and those living with cancer. It walks people through investigations, treatment, and living with the consequences of cancer and its treatment in an extremely practical way. It is also excellent in helping people address the psychological aspects of diagnosis, having been co-written by a clinical psychologist and an oncologist. It is well laid out and medical terms are well explained. Some pictures would have been helpful, e.g. an MRI machine. It is US specific in places, for example some referral pathways are not the same as here, but this does not put me off recommending it for UK patients.

### **Macmillan GP (46-55) (November 2017)**

This book is sympathetically written, gives the facts, and does not hide anything. It is honest and factual, useful for anyone affected at any stage – patient, carer, family. I wish I had read it at the start of treatment. The section on what cancer is and how it functions is very interesting, and I learned a lot.

The authors, an oncologist and a palliative care doctor, are experienced in their fields and neither talks down to the reader. I found it easy to understand and find what I needed. It is well laid out in a logical order, nicely bound on good paper and the typeface is easy to read; this gives it a quality feel and gives the reader confidence.

I like the easy style and the friendly way subjects are discussed. I felt almost as if the authors were holding my hand. There is a section for terminal patients and their loved ones and this is handled sensitively and with compassion. One of my few criticisms is that it glosses over radiotherapy and its side/after effects. I suffered quite bad side effects from radiotherapy and would like to see more about this.

This is a good companion for all stages of treatment, from diagnosis to, hopefully, a good outcome, especially for those undergoing chemotherapy. I can't say I enjoyed reading it – it is, after all, a sad and difficult subject – but it is a reassuring companion and one that I certainly recommend. It is written with an American audience in mind but is still relevant to a UK readership. I was pleasantly surprised at the similarities of the treatments, I just wish our overstretched NHS had the same resources.

**Recovering from prostate cancer (hormone therapy and radiotherapy).  
Septicaemia from my biopsy caused a 5-day stay in hospital (56-65)  
(September 2017)**

This is one of the best books I have read about cancer. It is very detailed and will be useful for patients and carers. It deals with all the medical aspects of chemotherapy and how side effects can be lessened with the right combination of medications. It also covers the emotional effects of cancer, how to deal with anxiety and depression and how giving in to your feelings of despair can be a good thing – something can be done about it. It also deals with cancer progression and is quite optimistic in that the difficulties of recurrence can be treated and alleviated, though not cured. It discusses end-of-life care and the process of dying and what the patient/carer can expect.

It is easy to understand and can be used as reference. It is structured so that if a patient does not feel able to read, for example, about dying, that section can be omitted. The sections are clearly marked and there are diagrams and statistical tables. The numerous case studies about how people have coped medically and psychologically are very interesting. It is American and so some of the information about hospice care and other hospital care is not entirely relevant for the UK. Despite this, it is very useful because of the depth of information it contains.

It has a lot of detail about pain relief, with information that I did not know, and a lot on how to alleviate chemotherapy side effects. I like that it has so much information not readily available about these topics and how cancer progresses. I also like that the patient is never blamed. For example, if a patient is not positive and their cancer progresses, the authors emphasise that it is not their fault and that it is not always

good to appear positive if you are despondent. It sees the reality of diagnosis from a psychological viewpoint as well as biological. There is some mention of alternative therapies, which the authors do not seem keen on. They are right to warn people about using their savings for treatments that have a small chance of working.

All in all, I was impressed with how this book has been written and the depth of the information. I am sure it will help people undergoing chemotherapy and experiencing side effects. I highly recommend it.

### **Womb cancer survivor (66-75) (July 2017)**



This book really does what it says on the cover. I was drawn to it as it claims to cover the emotional aspects of a cancer diagnosis. Being recently diagnosed with primary cancer, then three weeks later with secondary cancer prior to any treatment starting, I am finding it very difficult emotionally, more so than the slight side-effects I currently experience from the medication. Early in the book, the doctors state that most patients take three months or more to absorb a diagnosis; there is so much to take on whilst investigations are conducted, the treatment plan is decided upon, and you meet many new people who will be involved in your care. I found it very easy to read and it has numerous practical tips throughout, some of which I have already been able to put into practice. It integrates the medical and emotional aspects of cancer throughout, making it easier to understand the impact of one on the other.

The book is laid out into three distinct parts: Part 1. Making sense of your diagnosis; Part 2. Managing symptoms and side effects; and Part 3. Dealing with progressing cancer. It will be useful at any point in the cancer cycle. Importantly, the authors tell you what is in each chapter or section; this prepares you for the topic, so you can decide if it is the right time for you to read it. For example, at an early stage of diagnosis, the patient may not be in the right frame of mind emotionally to read the part on progression of cancer.

The authors practice at Massachusetts General Hospital where palliative care has been fully integrated with oncology services for over a decade. Throughout the book, they illustrate what is happening to your body either from the cancer itself or from the treatments, and how that can impact on your mental wellbeing and quality of life. The case studies cover all types of cancer but there is a common theme in terms of the symptoms they may be experiencing. The doctors explain why they ask the questions they do at consultations and how this will help plan the treatment. They also provide lists of questions the patient may want to ask at consultations, in relations to symptoms, treatments, scan results, other tests or next steps. They explain how to phrase the questions to get the most from the consultation.

It is easy to understand. All terms are fully explained and there are cross references to other sections if a fuller explanation has previously been provided. The chapters are clearly labelled, and the index is very detailed, making it easy to use the book as a reference and quickly find the information later. The paperback has a sturdy cover

and quality paper (environmentally friendly) and a clear typeface that is easy to read. There are a few good quality line drawing illustrations. Both authors come across as empathetic and experienced professionals with a caring attitude to do their best for the patient and relatives but deferring to the patient's wishes if difficult circumstances arise within the family setting.

I like the integrated approach by the health professional working with the patient to provide the best options for coping with cancer. The authors explain why they ask the questions they do at consultations and how this helps then determine the cause of the symptom and/or concern. They provide lists of questions for the patient to consider when collating information to report symptoms or concerns to the health team. Tables of symptoms are provided, with possible causes and options for treatment. This will definitely help me provide more details about my side effects; I now have tools to help me consider the type of information that the health team may ask at my next appointment, so I will be better prepared for the consultation.

It is not really a dislike, more of an observation. In describing chemotherapy, there are four broad categories – traditional cytotoxic chemotherapy, hormonal therapy, immunotherapy and targeted therapy – and all can be given intravenously, orally or subcutaneously. When discussing side effects, most of the examples refer to the day of, or immediately following, an infusion. I take oral hormonal therapy, so in my mind I had to relate the infusion reference to where I was in my drug cycle. That aside, it provided very useful information that I could relate to.

When I started reading this book, I was in a quandary about reading Part 3 (Dealing with progressing cancer); I do not wish to know my prognosis and there are many questions I have not asked my health team because I fear the answers. Early in the book, the doctor explains why this approach is not necessarily the best, as the fear of the unknown and how you build it up in your mind can be worse than the reality. He does provide one tool – “Put it in the box” – so you can chose to put subjects in a box, close it, and open it when you feel ready, and for a short period, ask what you want then put the subject back in the box and close it for another time. As I read the book, I was led through the various scenarios and prepared for the next parts, so I did read the final part of the book, and now that part of the book is back in the box with the lid closed for me.

I recommend this book. The patients' experiences cover a wide range of cancers, so it is useful to all as a general reference source for all types of cancer. I would explain up front that, as it is an American publication, some of the measurements/scenarios might not be applicable to NHS care. However, there are equivalents, so this should not detract from the wealth of information provided. Some of the practices, e.g. more emphasis on insurance to cover treatment and inpatient stays in hospital or hospices, might not appeal to all, so I have rated this book a 4 rather than a 5.

I had no choice about being diagnosed with cancer, but I do have a choice about the way I live, and I want to live well with cancer; I believe that this book has given me some tools to work closely with my medical and palliative care team to achieve this.

**Recently diagnosed with secondary breast cancer (56-65) (November 2018)**

This book is what it says on the cover; it will appeal only to someone with cancer, or a friend or relative, or someone with an interest in cancer. The information is very good and to the point. It is well laid out in a logical order, and easy to read and understand. A glossary would be helpful for quick reference. The quality of the illustrations is basic, and the paper quality is not so good, I don't like the feel of it.

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

Finally, a book with a chapter on blood cancers, including mine. As far as I'm aware, the first book to do so. Miracles can happen! That aside, it is a gem for anyone with, or who knows someone with, cancer. It is written with intuitive insight into patients and what they need or want to know. It is succinct, but without missing out anything and manages to maintain a great 'bedside manner'.

It is very easy to understand; the medical terminology is explained in a matter-of-fact way. Case studies make the various pieces of information understandable and relevant. Each chapter has subheadings, making it an easy read. The style is not chatty, but not too formal either. The design is ok; it does look like a medical text.

A sensible, no-nonsense, but empathetic guide to cancer types and treatments, and related questions. It is more a book to dip into than read straight through but could be a cancer 'Bible'. A great book.

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

I strongly recommend this book. I so wish I'd read it when I was diagnosed and during my first year of treatment. It is relevant for those living with cancer, their families and carers, and for all GPs and professionals to recommend to patients. I now have secondary cancer and have found it particularly helpful in discussing coping strategies when faced with a serious diagnosis. It is aimed at US readers, yet still relevant for the UK. It is in a logical, clear order and easy to understand; the writing is clear and straightforward. I like the paper, typeface, size and general layout. Illustrations to break up the text might help.

Chapters 7 and 8 are very helpful for emotional coping strategies and how to cope with changes in your body. Chapter 11 is especially helpful in relation to pain control strategies: How to use long- and short-acting opioids to deal with severe cancer pain and yet maintain exercise and activities of daily living that matter to you – incredibly important for many people. It is good to see such a comprehensive section on how to manage cancer related fatigue to minimise the effects on everyday life (Chapter 16). Finally, Section 3 (Dealing with progressing cancer) is well written and helpful when coming to terms with treatable, yet incurable cancer. Everyone wants different levels of information about their prognosis at different times. An open honest dialogue with professionals is vitally important. The section on end-of-life and hospice care is more relevant to a US audience but the same principles of advance care planning and making decisions about treatment options at end of life are important.

Do read this book, you will find it invaluable. You can choose to read the chapters most relevant to you. I am impressed by how it empowers people with cancer to ask questions and to make shared decisions about their care to ensure they have the highest quality of life and experience throughout their journey.

### **Living with secondary breast cancer (56-65) (February 2018)**

This is quite a technical book about the different ways of managing treatment plans, prompting the right questions for patients and their support network to ask. It will help people cope with the emotional and physical shock of diagnosis, and how to make sense of everything.

It is a nice book, with thick, heavy pages, well written, comprehensive and logical. I like its emphasis that living is still possible. It provides emotional support from diagnosis to treatment. It is written with honesty and integrity as you would expect from two experienced doctors. It helps to de-jargon cancer terminology without being patronising. However, it is focused on the US health system, in terms of clinical staff.

### **Blood Cancer Charity Worker (26-35) (February 2018)**

I enjoyed reading this book. The authors are very knowledgeable in their individual fields of oncology and palliative care. It has the right amount of information and I did not get bored. It has information for every stage of cancer – from first diagnosis to end-of-life care – and includes most cancer types. Some of it was not relevant to me so I suggest that people read the chapters relevant to them, depending on their circumstances. The authors explain end-of-life care and dying professionally and sensitively. The inclusion of real case studies is very helpful; I could relate to what they were going through and how they were feeling.

Most the book is easy to understand but there are some technical words that the authors do not explain properly; a glossary would be helpful. The cover is a bit boring but the illustrations inside are good. There is a good explanation of the tables in the text. The size of the text is small and people with poor eyesight may not be able to read it. The paper is made of recycled materials which is good for the environment.

Overall, a very good book. I recommend it to anyone affected by a cancer diagnosis. It is particularly useful for what to expect when you get an advanced cancer diagnosis. You do not have to read it all, just the chapters relevant to you.

### **Living with secondary breast cancer of the liver (46-55) (October 2017)**

This book is quite fact heavy and clinical in feel, which makes it more appropriate for someone with a medical background. Whilst I would recommend it to patients, it might be a bit overwhelming and frightening for them to read about all the treatment and side effects and end of life. However, there is much information that could help carers, family and friends assist the patient better.

The book is presented in a logical order, starting with initial symptoms, leading on to diagnosis, treatment, side effects, and finishing with end-of-life care. This means that the reader can read up to the sections that relate to them most. If their cancer is curable, then they may not need to carry on reading to the end chapters.

The cover is plain, a bit clinical perhaps, but explains clearly what the book is about and what to expect. The content is a bit text heavy and there are few illustrations, so it can feel like a lot of information to take in. However, the sections are presented nicely and coherently. The authors try to explain technical words as they go along but it is still quite difficult to understand. There are a lot of medical terms and drug names that cannot be further explained in layman's terms. Whilst it is good that the authors cover so much information, it can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially for the patient. Also, it is American, and some terminology is different from that in the UK; this makes it a bit disjointed to read but is purely a language barrier.

I like the arrangement in clear, distinct sections so you need read only the bits that are relevant. Whilst it is in order – diagnosis, treatment, end of life – you don't have to read it from cover to cover to get the most out of it. For example, if you are suffering from side effects, you can skip to those chapters and it will be as useful as if you read the whole book. The case studies give it a human element that readers can identify with; it's very difficult to identify with facts and figures. There could be more illustrations to break up the text, most of which requires medical knowledge, and make it easier to read and digest. A glossary would help, especially when readers do not understand American terminology, let alone any of the basic medical terminology.

I recommend this book to anyone with any type of cancer. It doesn't focus on one cancer, but on everything about cancer; this means that anyone can identify with it.

### **Daughter of patient with Stage 4 oesophageal cancer spread to liver, lymphs, and stomach (Under 25) (October 2017)**

This book explained many things that no one took the time, or trouble, to explain to me when I went through all this. I wish I could have read it seven years ago, it would have been an immense help. It is useful for the physical and emotional aspects of living with cancer, knowing what is happening in your body and what might happen. There are some very useful tips for helping with the usual side effects of treatments like chemotherapy, although they are far from conclusive, and the authors provide lots of explanations about diagnosis, procedures, what's happening during treatment, which patients often never receive from their doctors. It is mostly meant for patients, but the authors describe and explain talks between doctors and patients and what patients should ask, and this is something that might be extremely interesting and helpful for healthcare professionals as well.

The subject is handled in a logical order: coping with diagnosis; coping with treatment and side effects; dealing with progressive cancer. I would like more detail about different cancers – diagnosis, treatment and prognosis can be quite different. This book is more about cancer in general, which means that essential information about your cancer might be missing. However, it offers a very good general overview.

It's a typical paperback, with a serious and professional look, just what I want in a book about cancer. There are some helpful diagrams. It is very easy to understand, even when it gets highly technical. Technical terms are used – it is very important to know them because your doctors will use them – but they are explained in a way that laypeople can understand. This is one of the very powerful advantages of this book.

The book centres around a US-American project and sometimes sounds too promotional and self-congratulatory. And there is one big problem that they ignore: most doctors will probably not have the time to explain all these necessary things, and there usually is no combined palliative care for side effects and emotional support. So, it's a bit of a "what should be", rather than a "that's the way it is"; reality makes things much harder and makes it much harder to cope with everything. It is about the American health system and needs to be adapted to the UK system to be really and concretely useful for patients trying to cope with being part of the "health machine". However, this does not alter the fact that there is some very helpful advice.

In a way, this book shows how to organise care better for cancer patients, care that helps them emotionally and takes them more seriously, more as individuals. It might be worthwhile to inject – and adapt – some of what is explained about the work of the authors, this special project, into the UK health system. Or, for that matter, the German system, where I went through my cancer experience.

Read this book if you want to understand the medical jargon and what is really going on in your body but supplement it with lots of information about your cancer. Take the advice, but do not forget that the health system in many cases cannot give you the time and all the explanations and helpful talks you will need. And, if you are a healthcare professional, please, just have a look at this book. I know you deal with cases like ours every day, but for us, it is special, it is unique, and it is new. We don't know what you know, so please try to explain a bit more – this book shows you what's important for you as well as for your patients.

**Breast cancer patient (46-55) (August 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.

**We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you.**

**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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