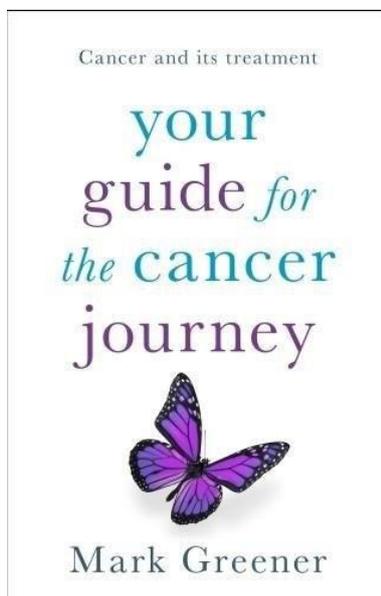


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BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



Your guide for the cancer journey (2018)

Greener M.
London: Sheldon Press, 2018.
xvii, 148pp.
ISBN 9781847094391.

Average star rating 3.8 (out of 5)

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This is an excellent book for someone who is looking for an unemotional, clinically accurate guide to the first, or treatment, stage of a cancer journey during which the cancer team tries to cure or limit the damage caused by a malignancy. A companion book covers the second, or recovery phase and the third, or maintenance, phase.

The first quarter discusses out-of-control cells and the causes and diagnosis of cancer. The following chapters cover surgery, radiotherapy, hormonal treatment, targeted treatments, and immunotherapy – each explaining in detail how it works and the side effects. Finally, two helpful chapters deal with side effects and introducing the next stages of the journey, touching on palliative care, social support, residual symptoms and long-term psychological effects. The coverage of side effects is comprehensive and full of (practical) self-help tips.

The author is a prolific healthcare author with a biomedical research background. He writes clearly, in a positive, factual textbook style that is easy to read and understand by lay and professional readers, particularly with the additional explanations in the body of the text. The main text is supplemented by shaded boxes that expand on specific topics and there are some helpful illustrations.

A useful book for those seeking a more technical explanation of cancer and its treatment, particularly initial treatment and side-effects. I found it very helpful and recommend it to those who are looking for facts presented in an unemotional style.

Carer for wife who has had bowel cancer twice (Over 75) (March 2019)

I recommend this book. Many people will find it useful. It can be used as a reference to all aspects of living with, or caring for someone with, cancer. It looks nice; it's well laid out and a good size. Generally, it is easy to understand – words are explained in the text – but a glossary would be useful; acronyms are explained on first use but when used later I had to go back to remind me what they meant.

It is a great source of information for those going through treatment and for their carers, family or friends. It is a comprehensive guide to treatment and side effects. It gives advice on ways to ease side effects and provides a list of useful addresses.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (November 2018)

Everyone should be given a copy of this book. I specifically like the section on cells out of control, and that on targeted treatments and immunotherapy. Immunotherapy is particularly hopeful in respect of future treatment for cancer.

The size and weight mean it can fit in a pocket or handbag. It is well structured and concisely written in plain understandable language appropriate for all. I like the gentle colours and the nice waxy cover.

It refers to interesting and complex concepts in a way that is understandable – I felt I was learning, whereas in some cancer books and websites I feel I am reading the same thing repeatedly. Patients need this language and knowledge so that we can articulate, and ask clearly for, the treatment we need to best help us survive.

Living with colon cancer and secondary liver metastasis (56-65) (November 2018)

The book would be informative interesting and supportive to a cancer patient, a partner, and friend. It will be less helpful to a health professional as they would know most if not all the content as a part of their training and job role. Someone living with cancer will find it useful at the start of their cancer journey, but less useful later as they will have learnt all of this as they progress through primary treatment. It very much deals with the causes of cancer, types of cancer, how to avoid it, spot it and its treatment, rather than living with secondary or incurable cancer. The whole book will be useful for carers

It is very well researched and written and accurate. It takes the reader through the science behind the causes of cancer – how it starts and grows, the division of cells – through diagnosis, treatment, ways to try to reduce the risk of occurrence and recurrence through diet, maintenance of a healthy weight and not smoking, for example. There is an excellent section at the end with the names of organisations that can offer further help, information and advice.

One of the major benefits of this book is that the author takes time to explain every term in detail, with many simple examples to help understanding; for example (p. 66), when talking about hormone receptors, he compares the relationship of these in the growth of breast cancer to that of the relationship of the ignition and key when starting a car. This makes it relatable, taking away the science and making it simpler to understand. There are many more examples like this throughout the book.

It is quite short, but this makes it very readable in a few hours and does not overload the reader with too much information; there is just enough in each chapter, and the author also explains where to find more information on that topic if required. The language throughout is very easy to understand and the author explains any technical terms in an easy to understand words. It's visually appealing and the quality of paper and print is good. There are various illustrations, showing how cancer cells divide for example, but no photos. As the author is British, he talks about the British private and NHS systems; this makes it very easy to relate to and the helpful organisations at the end of the book for further information or help are British.

I like everything about it. It is an excellent read; it kept my interest and attention throughout. It is easy to understand but not patronising. It explains everything in a logical manner from the causes of cancers, through to diagnosis, treatment, prevention and recurrence. It also gives very helpful information on the symptoms of primary cancers and metastases to look out for.

It should be compulsory reading for cancer patients as it explains everything in a straightforward, understandable way. It is very informative and positive. It ends with a quote, "No condition, not even cancer, however desperate, is quite hopeless". I wish I had read it at the start of my journey – it would have helped me greatly. I had breast cancer a year ago; this explains the process in far better and more detail than any of the doctors or breast cancer nurses; for example it gave me the information that a cancer of 1 cm diameter – which mine was – would have taken approximately five years to grow to this size; this answered a question that no one had been able to tell me. In fact, it answered a lot of questions that felt too silly or trivial to ask a doctor.

Breast cancer patient (46-55) (October 2018)



I definitely recommend this book. It is very useful for most aspects of cancer and its treatment. It is well written, and easy to follow and understand.

Living with duodenal cancer (46-55) (February 2019)

This covers a wide range of issues that affect people with cancer but also has information on the causes of cancer and statistics, useful to help survivors lead a healthy life. It is also useful for understanding what is going on in the body, i.e. how it forms and develops. There are easy-to-read descriptions of the treatments available and useful techniques for dealing with the side-effects of cancer and its treatments. There is also information on the causes of cancer to help people do what they can to reduce the risk of recurrence and/or the development of a new primary cancer.

I am not a health professional but feel I understood everything. The author uses statistics, comparisons, analogies and examples to highlight more technical aspects, and occasionally graphs and drawings, which can help those who absorb information better this way. The cover is appealing and phrased in a positive way. The text is a good size and broken up with white space, headings, drawings and graphs to make it much easier to read. Chapters are relatively short, and bullet-points make the book appealing to read and the messages put across in a concise manner

I like that the book is factual, succinct and informative. It lives up to its title by way of portraying cancer as a journey that can have a variety of different twists and outcomes and that each one is likely to be different. I like the fact that there is a positive feel to the book and the information in it and that there are some very practical tips, for example, managing side effects and useful questions to ask your medical team. It is written in such a way (mostly) that a cancer patient could feel

more confident that side effects can be managed. The author is also careful to note in many places, the importance of discussing symptoms and any actions a cancer patient may wish to take, with their cancer team. Another useful aspect was that the author makes it clear that a prognosis is not a literal 'countdown' but rather an analysis of statistics an element of estimation which can easily be wrong either way!

Although the overall feel of the book is very positive, there are one or two facts that are a little too brutal and honest. I have mixed feelings about whether they should be included, bearing in mind how much power the mind has over the body. One that sticks in my mind states that "... the effects of fatigue from the treatments can lead to patients contemplating suicide or wishing for an early death". This may be harsh for someone dreading treatment or trying to stay positive and overcome the tiredness. There are a lot of facts and statistics about the causes of cancer, which are useful for someone who has not already got cancer and, as the author intended, to prevent another primary cancer from developing. However, for someone whose prognosis is not so good and whose lifestyle may have made them a 'more likely' candidate for cancer, this may lead to feelings of guilt and they can't go back and change it.

I recommend it. It is a very useful overall guide covering several angles, and a useful, informative guide as to what to expect. It is written in a very positive way to help people lead as good a quality of life as possible, whatever the prognosis.

Family member has bowel cancer metastasised to liver (46-55) (February 2019)

This book is written by a well-qualified and experienced doctor. It should be given to all patients to help them cope with the months ahead, physically and emotionally. It covers all aspects, from diagnosis, through treatment, to living with, or after cancer, including physical and emotional aspects. It is also useful for carers.

It is in a logical order, starting with how cancer starts, moving on to causes, diagnosis, treatments and side effects, and finally living with cancer after treatment. It is very easy to understand; all topics are approached in an easy to understand, matter-of-fact and straightforward manner. It is not appealing to look at – no pictures and few diagrams – but I like the logical approach to the three stages of a cancer journey and the subdivisions and tips in each chapter, all making it very readable.

I like most aspects of the book. The starting point is that advances in medicine mean that increasing numbers of people now survive cancer and the author examines the sophisticated treatment choices that help to maximise chances of recovery. There are helpful tips about, for example, symptoms, diet, and coping with side effects. It helps to deal with cancer objectively and scientifically, dispelling myths and giving a realistic view of available options and treatments, as well as emotional aspects such as depression and anxiety. It does, however, assume that all patients will survive. There is little, if any, coverage of dealing with a terminal diagnosis and how this might be approached, physically and emotionally. Although this makes the book positive in some respects, I feel it is unrealistic. There may be another or other books that deal with dealing with a terminal cancer diagnosis, palliative care, end of life issues.

Oesophageal cancer survivor (56-65) (January 2019)

This is most useful for anyone looking for information about diagnosis and what happens immediately after. It goes into detail about procedures, drugs, medical terms, cancer progression and treatment choices. It is particularly good at explaining what happens to cells and how cancer starts. Recovery and maintenance are covered in the author's other books.

It is simply laid out with few illustrations. Sections of "ideas" are shaded grey so that you can read them separately. It is in a logical order, from what happens to cells, through diagnosis, to treatments and coping with side effects. It is detailed using lots of medical terms and references to medical articles. Everything is explained in the text. The list of references allows you to locate the article and read further if required.

I like the simple way that the author describes cell division and how cancer starts. Sometimes it's hard to read but the author does provide relevant statistics and relates them to today. I don't like the use of the word "journey". To me a journey comes to an end and is something that you choose to go on. This is normal life, albeit perhaps a different normal from that which you expected and had before.

It is a comprehensive book, with many references to medical journals and texts. The author gives good advice on self-help. All in all, I like it and found it an easy and interesting read – I read the first four chapters in one sitting! It contains information on what to expect when you're diagnosed and allows you to read about your treatment once you know your treatment plan. The sections on cell division and how cancer starts could be deemed to be of interest to most people but useful to say medical students or health professionals. There is also contact information for self-help groups and charities. For someone who wants just to learn about their cancer and treatment, a lot will be irrelevant. For someone who wants to be informed about many treatments, to learn the "whys", and find further reading, it could be very useful.

Living with ovarian cancer (46-55) (August 2018)

Whilst this is excellent, I recommend it only to certain people. It isn't an easy read in places and not for the faint-hearted – it explains cancer, treatment, and side-effects in detail. It is quite technical in parts, not bed-time reading. It is hard to rate it: for some it will be brilliant; others will find it heavy and possibly overwhelming. If I'd picked it up when diagnosed I might not have got past the first chapter.

It is well laid out and the sections are well signposted, making it possible to dip in and out for information on a specific topic. The cover is attractive, and the title suggests it will be a good read for someone just diagnosed. It isn't well bound though and started to come away from its cover as I started to read it.

I like how the author uses bullet points when he gives suggestions for managing side-effects or advice on things to look out for. However, I found some information, particularly the descriptions of what cancer is, how it develops and cancer types, heavy going despite already knowing some of it. The author explains what he means but some will still be put off and not continue. I read it all because I was reviewing it, but had I picked it up under other circumstances I may well have put it down before I got to what is excellent information. I also don't like the frequent statistics.

It is an excellent reference for professionals and a good go-to reference for cancer patients, family or friends who want to understand different treatments or information on coping with side-effects. I would have found it useful when I was going through treatment. It is very useful if you can get past the detail in some of the early sections. The sections on managing side-effects are extremely good. It isn't a bed-time read as it is quite technical in parts, although the author explains topics in depth, particularly the chapters around the development and causes of cancer. It is however excellent on treatments, warning signs, and suggestions for coping with side-effects.

Volunteer supporting people with a variety of cancers having had breast and ovarian cancer myself (56-65) (August 2018)

This is a book to dip in and dip out. It has useful information about all aspects of treatment, side-effects and beyond. The beginning is interesting as it gives a 'history' of how cancer occurs.

It is very easy to understand, with clear headings and non-precocious text. Good explanations and diagrams help. The cover is ok (a bit cancer-ish) but the layout and organisation of the text is excellent. There is a lot of detail about different treatments, but it is broken down by using subheadings, which makes it easy to read.

I like the clear, precise information. It doesn't preach as others can do and the author does state that the book does not replace medical advice and is not a medical book. That said, it is packed with useful (medical) information as well as tips and suggestions about what to do about the side-effects from different treatments.

My only criticism is that it doesn't deal with blood cancers, but this is purely selfish. It is great for those seeking information as it is imparted in a clear, no-nonsense and understandable manner.

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

This takes you through cancer step by step, from causes, through treatment, to the next steps. It is best read at diagnosis but not for the nervous and a certain amount of medical understanding is needed. It is well written. The language is at times very medical but for the subject in question it must be. The bullet point lists are good.

I like that it covers all aspects, including the different pathways that treatment could take, also how it shows how cancer progresses due to no fault of the patient's lifestyle. It does refer to a follow-up book by the same author and, without reading it, I would have thought putting them together would be a better option.

I might recommend it, but only to selected patients; some of the content is a bit raw.

In the clear from colon cancer (Over 75) (July 2018)



This book may be useful for some people, particularly someone new to the situation, either recently diagnosed or close to someone who has been diagnosed.

I like the explanations of symptoms and side effects, but I found it a difficult read because I am not good with numbers. Most things are explained but not all and some of it is too technical. The tone is too objective, and it is a purely factual book. It may suit someone who is keen on statistics, which I am not – too many numbers for me.

I have had a liver transplant due to cancer on the liver (56-65) (April 2019)

This book has a lot of technical information, including: how the body works (cell division, cells sending signals, protein production, hormones); treatment options (chemotherapy, radiotherapy, brachytherapy); side-effects of treatment and medications to help alleviate them; statistics on cancers and treatment effectiveness. There are also sections on surgery, immunotherapy, and complementary therapies, and tips on diet, giving up alcohol, and on smoking, exercise, and fatigue.

This information is hard to follow in many places due to the complexities involved. For instance, people with the same cancer may have different symptoms, may react differently to drugs (chemotherapy and those combating side-effects) and whether the cancer is controlled or spreads. Therefore, each person must have their own individual cocktail of drugs and associated treatment. The author does mention that even many specialists find information, especially new advances in diagnosing and treatment, difficult to comprehend. I recommend that the book is read at least twice with a couple of weeks between. It will be most useful when seeing a specialist to discuss the information so that they can explain anything more simply.

The book has several diagrams and analogies which help with the understanding as well as text boxes of bullet points relating to some sections of the text. The front of the book contains a list of books from the publisher, which will be useful for many aspects of life not just the cancer journey. The back of the book contains a list of useful addresses (with telephone numbers, websites and postal addresses).

Overall, I feel the book was written by an expert for those with a medical background. I was expecting something less technical, with fewer statistics, that would explain the journey: have symptoms; visit GP; go for tests; have treatment; what happens next. If you ask most people who have been through cancer they would explain this in layman's terms without the biological information and statistics. I give it four stars for someone with the knowledge to understand it, but three for the ordinary person.

Macmillan volunteer (56-65) (December 2018)

For me, the hints, tips and help for dealing with the various side-effects of cancer treatment are the most useful parts of this book. There is lots of practical advice and helpful tips to try, which I found very useful and genuinely helpful.

Starting with how cancer comes about and finishing with a section on what's next after treatment, the order of the book is perfect. The sections where the author explains how cancer operates and some of the causes of different cancer are very technical, but I've not found a more detailed explanation of the side effects anywhere else. It might be too much information for some people, or quite dense, but I found it interesting and the explanations helped me understand my cancer better.

The book has a nice cover; it isn't intimidating and doesn't look obviously about cancer. The use of break-out boxes, flow charts, bullet points, and diagrams is helpful for breaking things down as the text can be quite dense at times. I suggest people pick out the sections of the book most relevant to them rather than feel they need to read it from cover to cover.

I like that you feel it is written by an expert, someone with medical knowledge who can break it down for you. It is objective – rather than overly subjective or emotional – which you need sometimes! I also like the volume of different topics it covered, while not being too specific to certain types of cancer.

It is quite useful for a better understanding cancer and its treatment in more detail. I did find it quite dense at times; it's not a light read and can go into quite a lot of scientific detail, but I focused on the bits that were most relevant or interesting to me.

Hodgkin lymphoma patient (26-35) (December 2018)

This book provides an overview on cancer as a disease, together with the various investigations and treatments involved. It is best read post-diagnosis when lots of investigations take place that can prove overwhelming. However, everyone is different and will want to tap into information when they feel ready.

It is reasonably easy to understand but a glossary would be useful; at times it gets carried away with clinical terms making it difficult to understand if the reader has limited understanding of the terminology. The front cover is warming; it sets a clear picture as to what to expect in terms of content. Within the text, areas of special consideration are in grey boxes. There are few illustrations.

I like the focus on facts and the short messages, which are to the point, and how it talks about cancer in general and signposts if specific questions arise. I like how it explains cell mutation, which is key to developing cancer. I don't like that it explains risk factors using statistics; although interesting it does not help the reader relate to it and can feel confusing.

It is quite useful but there is a lot of very good specific information for lay people from various charities that is more specific to the individual and easier to understand.

Living with consequences of breast cancer (56-65) (October 2018)

I would describe this as a well-researched textbook, a useful resource for nurses and other health professionals learning about cancer treatment regimes. It may suit someone who enjoys reading about survival statistics, or the differences between cancer drugs; it does not address aspects of emotions, feelings and everyday living.

It is a standard-sized paperback. The text is in a clear font and there are useful boxes that highlight key facts. The writer has a very clear style. The use of subheadings and 'fact-boxes' add clarity to the content of each themed chapter. Despite the depth of research and medical slant of the book, the author does not use medical jargon, and his writing style is friendly and clear.

The author has written 25 other books on medical issues. His background in medical research is immediately evident as he quotes research and statistics regularly. He does not use case studies or anecdotes to bring the research to life. What I dislike about this book is its ambition, to cover 'cancer treatment' in 129 pages – this means that it does not cover any cancer in depth. It is targeted at people with cancer but, in my view, should be addressing medical professionals. People with cancer need information about their type of cancer, not an overview of all cancers. Statistics about survival can be upsetting; would you be happy to learn that the statistical odds are that you will still be alive in three years' time? It does not address emotional issues or day-to-day living. It is a textbook for trainee medical professionals. This limits its success in informing someone with a cancer diagnosis. It is addressed to patients, but it would be more suitable for a trainee medical professional who needs an overview of treatments, statistics, side effects and medical outcomes for various treatment approaches. What is more, with new treatment regimes constantly being explored, the information may quickly become outdated.

This book may appeal to some, but it was not for me. For someone with cancer, I recommend one (or more) of Macmillan Cancer Support's booklets that address every type of cancer individually, giving useful advice on emotional aspects, daily living issues, and the specifics of living with cancer of every type and stage. To complement this, internet research using high-quality websites can add information about specific drugs and their side effects, should a person wish to discover more details. Buying a book such as this, which describes treatment up to 2018, has limited value. However, the author has a clear and interesting writing style and occasionally humanises his facts by adding his own reactions to research (e.g. being surprised that everyone with cancer does not have depression).

Former health professional. Friend. (56-65) (June 2018)

This is a detailed, text heavy, scientific-based book that uses a lot of statistics, so it might not appeal to all, but it has some very useful and informative chapters on all aspects of cancer and treatments. It is most useful to people who have just been diagnosed and are interested in finding out more about what cancer is and the treatment options available. It is factual in tone and more useful to dip into rather than read from cover to cover. At times, it feels more like an informative textbook, so it will not suit every reader; it doesn't have a very 'friendly' voice. If someone wants to find out about what cancer is at a cellular level and enjoys learning the scientific detail of how a treatment works on cancer, then this book is for them.

It is logical, and fact driven, and scientific in its description of cancer and its treatment. The scientific language may put off some readers, even though the author does explain what the terminology means. Some people with cancer will not find it easy to read unless they enjoy medical, scientific and research-based reading material. Some of the facts might frighten some people with cancer; it gives a lot of statistical information, which can be stark. I found the use of statistics confusing at times; for example, '1 in 4' and '7 in every 10' in the same sentence.

The cover does not reflect the content. The butterfly implies it is a general guide for someone through their cancer journey, but in fact it is the opposite. It is text heavy, evidenced based, and statistics driven. It contains a wealth of information, but the font is too small, and the diagrams and text are squeezed onto the page. Colour diagrams would stand out more and make the text more engaging.

The title implies that the book will cover all aspects of the cancer journey, but it focuses on diagnosis and treatment. It does not address the psychological, emotional or financial concerns of diagnosis and in the last chapter Mark Greener refers to his other book 'The holistic guide for cancer survivors'. It is a guide for the health professional or those who are interested in reading a book that has a matter-of-fact tone. The statistics might frighten someone newly diagnosed as it lays bare the facts on survival rates for certain cancers and this may cause more distress. The summary on the back does little to portray accurately what the book is about.

It is very informative – an in-depth look at how cancer forms, is investigated and treated. I think I would pick it up to find the answer to a question I may have or need to answer on behalf of someone. There is a lot of information based on the medical side of the cancer journey which is very interesting and summarised in minute detail. I have learnt a lot from reading this book and I think I will use it when I need help in understanding some aspect of cancer in more depth. It gets to the microscopic level when it discusses cancer and its treatment, so it suits a reader that already has some general knowledge about cancer and its treatment.

I would be mindful as to whom I would recommend it. It is not easy to read and requires some concentration, which is why I liken it to a textbook. Someone having treatment will find it overwhelming due to the detail. It may suit those who already have a general understanding of cancer and its treatment and who are looking for more detailed information about cancer at a cellular level. It has the tone of a book for someone to use as study material. A health professional in another field who may be interested in what cancer is and how it is treated will get a lot from it. It will also suit anyone with an interest in biology who wants a detailed explanation of how treatment works in someone with cancer.

Health care professional (26-35) (June 2018)



This is informative and factual, but does not seek to provide hope or comfort, just stark reality. It will be useful for anyone not emotionally connected to someone who has cancer, or a cancer patient themselves. It has good on how to manage effects of cancer – hair loss, nail care – but if you are new to cancer it could be intimidating and frightening. I would prefer a softer, less intense book that offers useful tips rather than having these in a book with some worrying statistics and prognoses.

It has an appealing look and is laid out well. It is easy to understand but not a jolly good read. I think it would be more useful to dip in and out of. I like that you can find a topic easily and read up on it. However, it feels very cold. There is no empathy. It is a good, accurate – as far as I know – account of possible cancer journeys, but overall it is quite depressing. If I had just been diagnosed with cancer and was trying to look on the bright side, this would bring me crashing down. I know it contains the reality of how cancer may affect us, but I think I would try and seek out another book that uses language in a more positive, supportive way.

It is useful if you want to know theory and fact about cancer, but I think I would try and find other books that deliver the blow with less force. I give it two stars for people with cancer, four stars for professionals or students wanting to learn about cancer.

Family member (46-55) (February 2019)

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

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