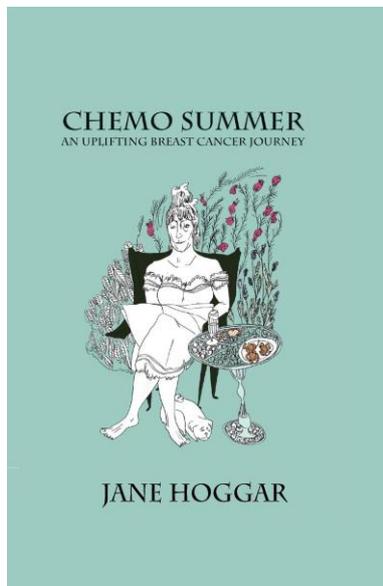


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# BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



**Chemo summer. An uplifting breast cancer experience (2017)**

Hoggar J.

London: Austin Macauley, 2017.

100p.

ISBN 9781786296610

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

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A wonderfully inspirational, uplifting book for anyone going through breast cancer but also a damn good read for anyone! It is most useful for how to stay positive, even when faced with something as terrifying as cancer. There's also a very useful glossary, which explains procedures that you might face during treatment, and links to useful websites, such as Macmillan Cancer Support and Cancer Research UK.

It's quite short, so might appeal to someone who is unsure of reading a book about cancer, or who perhaps doesn't read often. It's also very easy to understand; anyone could read it without getting lost or confused and the glossary means you can look up anything you're unsure of. There are several quirky images, which add to its appeal, although I'm not sure who the person on the cover is meant to be; she looks like a rather stern drunk, which is nothing like the author!

It could offer a lot of emotional support. By the end, Jane's easy style of writing made me feel as though I knew her. There's also something comforting about the book. Although it's about cancer, it shows you there is still more to life and that a cancer diagnosis doesn't mean you have to give up. Jane is in charge of her cancer, not the other way around. There are different types of breast cancer, so it might not be suitable for everyone, but its easy style and Jane's optimistic voice invite you to remain optimistic. I also love the fact that when she needed help, or even just a lie down, she asked for help or took a rest. Her self-care during treatment (in my opinion) seems to help keep her stress levels low and her sense of humour intact!

This is by far one of the best books I've reviewed. Jane is a very talented writer and I found I was just getting lost in the book each time I picked it up. Jane isn't looking for sympathy and she certainly doesn't sugar coat her diagnosis but her sense of fun and sheer optimism are so contagious that I kept forgetting I was reading a book about cancer. Fans of Victoria Wood may also particularly enjoy it because Jane peppers the book with fantastic lines such as, "Have you got it all in, Karen...or is that just the nipple, dear?". I thoroughly recommend it. It's so funny and, despite its serious theme, it's a happy book. I was sad to finish it and wish it was longer! I hope Jane is considering a sequel because I'd love to read more.

**Survivor of Burkitt Lymphoma (non-Hodgkin) (46-55) (January 2020)**

Jane describes her breast cancer from the moment she noticed something wrong, through diagnosis and treatment to full recovery. Her cancer did not manifest itself as a lump, but as a sag when she lifted her arms, and her insistence that something was wrong got her an early diagnosis and intervention. She had surgery, without the need for mastectomy, then chose chemo and radiotherapy to make sure everything was done to avoid recurrence. She explains her experiences in detail, with invaluable tips about do's and don'ts in hospitals or when choosing wigs. She also describes the lifestyle changes she made after treatment, all in a very positive and optimistic tone.

It is a pocket-sized book, on good-quality paper, and in an easy-to-read font. It is a quick and pleasant read, with some funny illustrations by Jane's daughter. It is easy to understand as Jane uses accessible language and explains terms in a glossary.

I was very impressed by the chapter where Jane explains how she spotted a sag in her breast when she lifted her arms and went to her GP. Although the mammogram didn't show anything wrong, she insisted and had an ultrasound performed, which found the tumour at an early stage, thus saving her breast from mastectomy.

### **Relative of a breast cancer patient (26-35) (January 2020)**

This light-hearted look at the ups and downs of treatment is suitable for someone with breast cancer, particularly in the early stages of chemotherapy. It is also useful for family and friends, especially women, to encourage them to check their breasts. It's not very big and is an easy read, written from the heart; there is nothing very technical and the glossary is good. I like the layout, typeface and illustrations.

I will recommend it. I like all of it, especially the last section on diet, health and moving on. It's practical and easy to follow. There are good tips for someone having chemo. I like how the author set up a blog so that she could keep everyone up to date without tiresome phone calls or texts. I will have my copy at my Macmillan information stand and pass it on to someone I feel will benefit from reading it.

### **I had breast cancer in 2011 (66-75) (December 2019)**

This is a great book. The author covers most topics and it is a lovely positive read for someone with breast cancer at any stage. It is very easy to read and follow and funny in places. I like how it looks and would definitely pick it up off the shelf. I love the humour. I love the glossary explaining treatments and other cancer related topics.

### **Ten years clear (46-55) (November 2019)**

I wish I had read this at diagnosis; it would have helped clear up many problems. It is a good, all-round book, covering diagnosis, treatment, and life after in a sensible manner. It is clear and well written, with a useful glossary. The title is interesting, and the illustrations have a touch of humour. Jane also includes good quality photographs of herself having treatment.

I enjoyed Jane's style of writing and her honest and frank account. She deals with her journey well and offers readers a lot of information that they will appreciate. She is obviously a bright, modern, lively and active lady who has a full and interesting life. This comes through in her writing and her book offers a common-sense insight into the breast cancer journey. I recommend it to anyone who has been diagnosed.

### **Breast cancer survivor (oestrogen receptive) (66-75) (September 2019)**

This is generally an uplifting account of a breast cancer journey. The informative but humorous style makes it easy to read. It will be useful from diagnosis as it informs patients about treatments to expect and is also useful for family and friends.

The book is adapted from a blog and the topic handled chronologically. It is easy to understand, and the glossary clarifies any technical words. I like the uplifting and at times humorous style. It is a concise and amusing read – trying to take positives out of a difficult journey for any patient. The tone is constructive and gives the reader an optimistic attitude towards outcomes. There is nothing I really don't like but the last section about lifestyle changes after treatment should not necessarily be used as a reference for all; even the author states that there is no firm scientific backing for the exclusion of dairy from the diet.

I gave it five stars due to the engaging writing, making it an easy yet revealing read in terms of physical and emotional difficulties after diagnosis and during treatment. It is informative about what one might expect to happen but puts a positive, and at times humorous, spin on challenging situations; this could be valuable as well as uplifting to any patient. It could also be helpful for carers and family for a fuller understanding of how a patient may be feeling. However, it is personal, so may not be accurate for all.

### **Breast cancer survivor (56-65) (September 2019)**

I like everything about this book, so much so that I read it twice; I still laugh at her son catching her talking to the earl grey teabag, and about Harry Hedgehog. Jane tells it warts and all, but her sense of humour is infectious and made me feel better about any treatment I may need. It is easy to understand, and I love the illustrations; funny but quite elegant with minimal use of colour and they add to the words but don't take over. It is very brave of her to include photos of herself and her 'head hair' and I almost choked with laughter when she apologises for not including images of her 'missing pubes'... such a real part of the journey! I've already recommended it and those who have got back to me have said how wonderfully uplifting it is and that it really does make this awful journey just a little bit easier. Well done Jane!

### **Living with breast cancer (66-75) (August 2019)**

Jane Hoggar tracks her experiences from the diagnosis of breast cancer through her treatment, which includes a lumpectomy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Rather than this being an "all-about-me" book, Jane is generous with her information and practical tips for others with a similar diagnosis.

It is a short book with an attractive cover and illustrations. The layout is clear, and the font is easy to read. It is very easy to understand, and Jane has a friendly and chatty writing style – readers are likely to warm to her character. Above all, she retains a positive and upbeat outlook, often seeing humour, where others would despair.

I like that Jane is upbeat in her account of her experiences. She does not allow her cancer to browbeat her; for example, she makes the experience of having her vein found for chemo a subject of humour, and her light-hearted approach extends even to the side-effects of chemo – cheerfully recounting her “tuneful farting” as something that her family must get used to. She describes the purchase of a wig as a hilarious adventure – a far cry from many people's approach. She has some important tips, e.g. isolate yourself from friends during chemotherapy to avoid infections that could compromise your health (Skype and phone instead), and she takes charge of her future health, giving up dairy, sugar and alcohol. Most of all, she values every day.

This is one of the most upbeat books I have read about cancer, and I read it one sitting. I recommend it. It may be less useful if your diagnosis and treatment are different from Jane's, but all readers have much to gain from reading her tips.

### **Former health professional (66-75) (July 2019)**

This quick read is informative about the general breast cancer journey and what to expect, with handy tips for getting through chemo and moving on. It encourages and inspires a manageable journey that is not all doom and gloom and has advice and thoughts on reducing the risk of cancer. It takes you through each aspect, from diagnosis to life after treatment. It doesn't go into technical detail but there is enough information to give you a good idea about getting through it all and what to expect, particularly relationships and how to deal with the reactions of family and friends. If you've had breast cancer you can really relate to Jane's experiences. I like the colour of the cover. The few illustrations are sufficient, and it is nice to see Jane smiling through treatment and hair loss. It is the tone that is most appealing. As the subtitle says, it is uplifting, and I wanted to read on to find out how Jane coped.

I really enjoyed how Jane describes her experience. It is funny, light hearted (at times I laughed aloud) and gave me hope. Not all cancer stories are positive, but this is refreshing; I could relate to it as it is very like my journey so far. It is good to be reminded that treatments are more manageable now, that we have some control over how we deal with diagnosis, and can reduce the risk of cancer or a recurrence.

Although most useful for someone with breast cancer, it is uplifting for anyone and may alleviate some of the worry if someone close to you has cancer. Jane is frank about her relationships and how sometimes people mean well but don't know how to act or what to say. It doesn't have the technical detail that some readers might want but it is one woman's journey and an example of how we can react to and deal with diagnosis. It gives hope and inspires positivity. I recommend reading it alongside a more technical book to get a good rounded picture of going through breast cancer.

### **Breast cancer patient (46-55) (April 2019)**

This lets you know that although things are scary and tough you can come out the other side. It is easy to understand, not excessively technical, and the glossary has explanations of terms. The only discrepancy I noticed is that Jane had steroids after chemo whereas I had mine before. However, she received slightly different drugs to me, so it may just be a different treatment protocol. It is portable and appealing, with lovely illustrations on the cover and inside and good paper quality. My copy isn't collated correctly; the acknowledgment and contents are between pages 1 and 3.

I like everything about this book (apart from the typeface – but it doesn't detract from the book – and the advice to wear a stretchy turban – not a good look) and enjoyed it a lot. It would have been useful when I was diagnosed. It's amusing and gives you a certain amount of hope; things will be tough but don't forget the funny things in life.

### **Breast cancer patient (56-65) (April 2019)**



People with breast cancer may be able to relate to the narrator and feel understood by her. It could also help those who know or care for someone with breast cancer to understand their perspective and adjust their language and responses accordingly. It is good for noticing early signs and encouraging people to see a doctor. It is also useful for anyone having treatment, particularly chemotherapy. The tips include things that most people will probably not consider in their first few sessions. It therefore might help people to feel more prepared, thus avoiding trial and error and discomfort during chemotherapy. I didn't notice any inaccuracies. Jane does promote some unproven theories, but she does state that they have not been proven.

The chatty narrative draws you in and it is easy to understand and follow. Jane starts with her diagnoses, continues through treatment, and on to her recovery and permanent lifestyle changes. She includes a glossary for technical jargon but doesn't overcomplicate any explanations; she simply uses the terms in their necessary context and it is appropriate for the intended audience. The typeface is clear and easy to read, and the chapters are broken down into sub chapters, which makes it easy to follow. The light cover makes you feel that the story will be light and cheery and you know what to expect from the subtitle.

I like that it is light hearted and warm; it gives you hope that you can overcome any circumstances. I like the practical advice for those living with cancer. However, although the advice is practical it is very much aimed at middle-class or more privileged people. Not everyone can adjust their diet or take time off work to recover – at times Jane does not seem to consider such socio-economic factors.

A useful book if you want some hope and you relate to the author's circumstances. I might recommend it; it would depend on their circumstances and how treatable the cancer is; it is not the right book for someone with a poor or terminal prognosis.

### **Relative of someone who died from liver cancer (Under 25) (November 2019)**

This introduction to breast cancer treatment is suitable for anyone. It explains treatment in a simple and humorous light-hearted way. A sense of humour and a positive frame of mind is the best way forward.

It is very easy to understand and feels true to home. I too have forgotten a lot of the details; I must have blanked out my experience, and have been told that others also have. I also met fantastic people along the way, through a forum and my surgeon to mention a few, and I dealt with it by keeping busy with work and a sense of humour. I agree that exercise is a good way to deal with a stressful life and I try to run every day. I have been told that alcohol should be limited to avoid my osteopaenia getting worse and have given up alcohol since I was diagnosed (so far). I eat a lot of green vegetables and my surgeon told me to have red meat once a week and check myself every 2-3 weeks. I don't eat sausages, bacon or processed meat (ham, turkey, chicken) and try to limit what I eat at work, such as cakes. I tried to give up dairy, cakes and chocolate and now eat a lot of walnuts, apricots, figs and prunes (all good against cancer) but do have some cakes and chocolate, vegan ideally, again now.

I would like more information about the details of Jane's cancer. I would like more information about Jane's diagnosis other than that it was small as that does not give me any information to compare my situation with hers. It is concise, and I would prefer a lot more information, for example about types of cancer, the operations available; however, this is Jane's blog so is about her experience. There are some differences, for example I was not advised to take paracetamol after every chemotherapy just after T if needed, but in my case it was only needed once.

### **I have had breast cancer treatment (46-55) (October 2019)**

Jane Hoggar describes her experience of breast cancer from her discovery of a 'sag' in her breast, through diagnosis and treatment, to life afterwards, and looks at how her family and friends were affected. Although our experiences and circumstances are different, it can be useful to learn how others have dealt with breast cancer.

It is very descriptive in parts and Jane explains in detail what happened during chemo, how long it took (much longer for those who wore cooling caps), the fact that there can be localised bruising at times and exactly how she felt and what happened when she lost her hair. She presents her experiences in a light-hearted way and it is easy to understand. There is a contents page and glossary and the chapters are clearly labelled, but there is no index. I didn't care much for the illustrations.

Despite the subject, it is humorous at times and shows how Jane tried to remain as positive as possible during her treatment. Handy tips are dotted throughout the book on subjects such as food, bras and drugs. It is useful for general information and to learn more about someone's experiences, but you must bear in mind that it is one person's experiences and might not include information on everything you want.

### **Daughter of a breast cancer patient (36-45) (August 2019)**

This is very informative about what someone living with breast cancer must deal with daily, including things that people won't necessarily think about. It will give health professionals an insight into how patients and families may feel.

There is a useful glossary for readers who are not health professionals. The colour of the cover is a good choice, but the picture on the front could be off putting.

**Carer/health professional; Family member had breast cancer (26-35) (February 2019)**



This account of the author's breast cancer diagnosis and treatment is written in a chatty and informal but informative way that is easy to read and understand. There are some useful pieces of advice, such as choosing a wig, talking to more than one oncologist before deciding on treatment, or whether to have chemo. However, the cover drawing and illustrations are unattractive.

It is a hopeful and positive story and one that is therefore useful for anyone affected by breast cancer and their families... or anyone interested, for that matter.

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



I was disappointed with this book; it is more general than I expected, with little on the impact on family and friends. Your own research will give you the information in the glossary and tips. Everyone's journey is different, but the author came across as self-centred, which I found off putting.

It is easy to understand but jumps around a lot. It looks what it is, i.e. a light-hearted book, although the cover is not inviting; the figure looks glum with what looks like a glass of wine although the author states that she no longer drinks alcohol. It is printed on good quality paper and is a good size and weight to put in a handbag.

I like some of the handy tips, but I found nothing new and overall it is a little irritating. It is one sided and the tone is not uplifting – maybe it's the author's sense of humour.

**Breast cancer patient (56-65) (April 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](http://macmillan.org.uk)**

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