

Healthier Communities,
Outstanding Care



Sherwood Forest Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Coping with your diagnosis

Information for patients



Learn about your diagnosis

When you are dealing with new or challenging circumstances, such as a cancer diagnosis, you may feel anxious and uncertain about your diagnosis and future treatments. This can sometimes make your medical appointments overwhelming. It can be helpful to have some practical strategies for approaching these appointments, including:

- Writing a list of questions that you can go through with your healthcare team.
- Bringing someone to support you during your appointments where possible, as they could help prompt any other questions to ask.
- Taking notes during your appointment and not being afraid to ask questions if there is anything you are unsure of.

Coping with the emotional side-effects

While it is common to focus on the physical side-effects of cancer in appointments, it is just as important to take care of your emotional well-being. A cancer diagnosis can bring about many changes in life, so it is essential to find support and resources to manage the emotional impact, just like you would for the physical side effects of treatment. For example:

- Reaching out for help from loved ones; having people who you can talk to can be very helpful. You might find that friends or family members may not be able to give the necessary support as they might not fully understand cancer and what to say regarding a cancer diagnosis. In this case, you can let people know that there's no single right thing to say and that it is helpful even if they just listen.
- There are other support options available such as counselling or psychology services which you could access through your GP or specialist nurse.
- Spiritual support through prayer or the guidance of a religious leader.
- Discover coping strategies from other patients and families that have experience of living with cancer.
- Give yourself time and space alone to discover ways to express your feelings and come to terms with your diagnosis. This can mean trying new things such as writing down your feelings or discovering new or creative hobbies that can be done during your cancer treatment.

It's normal to sometimes feel angry, anxious, or down about having cancer. But if you feel sad all the time, are regularly having trouble sleeping or you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or of harming yourself, these are signs that professional help might be needed.

Other difficulties that may require further support include not being able to engage in the things that are meaningful to you due to feelings of panic, intense anxiety, or crying a lot. If you are experiencing any of these difficulties, contact your cancer nursing team or GP who can refer you on for additional support.

Support groups

Another way to get additional support can be through support groups for people experiencing similar things to you. For lots of people with cancer, expressing thoughts and feelings with a group of people going through the same thing can sometimes feel easier than with friends and family. You can also gain important practical information about living with cancer from support groups. Talk to your cancer care team about local support groups in your area or about online support groups.

Coping with fatigue

One of the most common side effects of cancer treatment is fatigue. It can leave you feeling tired physically, mentally and emotionally, meaning you have less energy to do activities you usually do. It can be very difficult adjusting to fatigue and might mean that you need to change your daily routine as a result.

Cancer-related fatigue is distinctly different from everyday tiredness, as cancer-related fatigue may be more severe and more distressing, and rest does not always relieve it. For some people, this kind of fatigue can be even more distressing than pain, nausea/ vomiting, or depression.

Fatigue usually goes away gradually after your treatment is finished. Until then, there are some things that you can do to help you deal with it:

- Make a list of your regular activities according to how important they are to you and use this list to prioritise completing tasks. It is important to accept that you might struggle to do all the things on this list and may need to postpone certain tasks to another day. You can create a new list of priorities each day so that eventually everything gets completed.
- Have a structured daily routine.
- Ask for help and delegate when you can.
- Place things that you use often within easy reach to save your energy.
- Use methods to reduce stress, such as deep breathing, visual imagery, meditation, prayer, talking with others, reading, listening to music, painting, or any other activity that gives you pleasure.
- Balance rest and activities. Schedule activities so that you have time for plenty of rest both during and in-between activities. Shorter rest periods are reported to be better than one long one.

- Avoid too much bed rest, which can lead to feeling weak.
- Talk to your doctor about how to keep any pain, nausea, or depression under control.
- Physical activity can really help and there may be local cancer-specific exercise programs that you can join. Discuss physical activity with your doctor or cancer physiotherapist before you start any program.
- Get fresh air, if possible.
- Unless you are given other instructions, eat a balanced diet and drink plenty of water each day.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

If you would like more support, please visit the Clinical Psychology Cancer Service website: <https://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk/our-services/clinical-psychology-cancer-service/>

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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