

Accessing Support: Coping with the Fear of Cancer Recurrence

As you adjust to life after cancer treatment it is common to have concerns that the cancer may return. Many people and their loved ones find it difficult to understand why it can be difficult to move on with their lives after treatment has ended.

The fear of cancer returning is a normal reaction and the intensity of these feelings often subides over time. However, for some people, the fear of recurrence continues to persist and can impact on their quality of life, and in these cases it can be helpful to seek out some support. Here are some potential ways to manage the fear of recurrence:



- Speak to your medical team about your risk of recurrence, signs to look out for, and who you can get in contact with should you have any concerns.
- Focus on what you can control – for instance, being involved in your follow-up appointments and making healthy adjustments to your lifestyle.
- Recognise the signs of stress, such as a racing heartbeat or sleeplessness, and manage these in a healthy way. For example, you could try meditation, relaxation, or exercise.
- Join a support group to discuss your concerns with other people who have had cancer.
- Speak to a counsellor, psychologist, or nurse if you are finding that the fear of recurrence is overwhelming. They may be able to help you balance your thinking or have a more helpful frame of mind.
- Identify your triggers for fear of recurrence – for some people these can be appointment letters and surveillance scans. Learn what helps you cope and make a plan for how to manage the triggering situations.

Below is a list of organisations who may be able to offer you some support, as well as some resources that you may find helpful to read/listen to. The range and quality of services/support available from such organisations may vary. This list has been gathered as signposting only, and The Royal Marsden cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information provided by an organisation listed or the quality of their services.

If you have any questions or would like further advice/guidance about where to seek specialist help in your local area, you can speak with a member of your Royal Marsden treatment team or the Adult Psychological Support Service.



The Cancer Survivor's Companion – Dr Frances Goodhart and Lucy Atkins

A well-renowned book on finishing cancer treatment. It includes sections on managing worry which apply well to coping with fear of recurrence.

Website link: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/12255755-the-cancer-survivor-s-companion>

Life After Cancer - Support Groups

A charity which brings people together who have finished cancer treatment to form support groups, with an aim to increase their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing. By talking to others, you might be able to get different perspectives on how others have managed their fear of recurrence. Life After Cancer also offer sessions of one-to-one cancer coaching to help people adjust to finishing treatment.

Website link: <https://www.life-aftercancer.co.uk/support-groups>

Macmillan - Life After Cancer Forum

This online forum is a space to discuss the physical and emotional after-effects of cancer. It can be useful to have an appropriate setting in which to express your concerns around recurrence, and get insight from others who are in a similar situation.

Website link: https://community.macmillan.org.uk/cancer_experiences/life-after-cancer-forum

Macmillan – Lifestyle and well-being after treatment

A resource outlining some steps you can take to help your body recover after treatment.

Website link: <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/after-treatment/lifestyle-and-wellbeing-after-treatment>

Macmillan - Worrying about Cancer Coming Back

This booklet on fear of recurrence covers understanding potential triggers for worries around recurrence, and some methods which can help in managing this worry.

Website link: <https://be.macmillan.org.uk/Downloads/CancerInformation/TestsAndTreatments/MAC14215WorryingaboutcancercomingbackEO1lowrespdf20131023.pdf>



The Brain Tumour Charity - "Scanxiety" Article

Scans can be scary experiences, especially if you are already worried about cancer recurring. The Brain Tumour charity have a resource (although the advice is applicable to other types of cancer) that uses text, video and a podcast episode to explore why "scanxiety" occurs, and strategies that can be used to try to manage it.

Website link: <https://www.thebraintumourcharity.org/brain-tumour-diagnosis-treatment/how-brain-tumours-are-diagnosed/scans-adults/scanxiety/>

Maggie's – Fear of Cancer Returning

This resource describes some common experiences that people report when worrying about cancer returning. It goes on to explore some strategies for managing the fear of recurrence, and how to recognize when to seek further help.

Website link: <https://www.maggies.org/cancer-support/managing-emotions/fear-cancer-returning/>

Other APSS Information and Resources

The Adult Psychological Support Service has a range of signposting information sheets on topics such as: coping at different stages of the cancer pathway, supporting your physical and emotional wellbeing, relationships, and information specific to certain types of cancer.

You can view the signposting information sheets on The Royal Marsden's [Patient Information Library](#) and the [Adult Psychological Support Service Website](#) (under 'Further information and resources'). You can also request a copy of these by emailing Psychological.SupportAdmin@rmh.nhs.uk or telephoning **020 7808 2777** (Chelsea) / **020 8661 3006** (Sutton).

Additional support services

Cancer Care Map

An online database of cancer support services. You can search by postcode or by particular themes e.g. cancer type.

Website link: <https://www.cancercaremap.org/>

Maggie's Cancer Centres

Cancer care centres with multiple locations, including The Royal Marsden Hospital, Sutton and Charing Cross Hospital, West London. Workshops, groups, information and one-to-one counselling available.

Website link: <https://www.maggies.org/>

Phone number: **0300 123 1801**

NHS Talking Therapies

NHS website to help you find your local psychological talking therapies service based on your GP address. Your local NHS talking therapies service can be helpful if you would like



psychological support for cancer when you are no longer regularly coming in for appointments at The Royal Marsden, as well as for concerns unrelated to cancer or that predated your cancer and have become worse due to it.

Website link: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-nhs-talking-therapies-service/find-your-gp>

If you need any specialist and personalised advice about your cancer treatment, symptoms or side effects, please contact The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline. This hotline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week on **020 8915 6899**.

The Royal Marsden's Adult Psychological Support Service offers short-term, cancer-specific psychological and psychiatric support. You can either self-refer or ask somebody in your Royal Marsden healthcare team to refer you. For more information, visit [Adult Psychological Support Service | The Royal Marsden](#). Alternatively, contact us directly on **020 7808 2777** (Chelsea), **020 8661 3006** (Sutton), or email Psychological.SupportAdmin@rmh.nhs.uk.



If you have ideas for other signposting or information sheets, or if you would like to be involved in working with APSS to improve the service we offer, please scan the QR code to see more about our patient and public involvement, or email Psychological.SupportAdmin@rmh.nhs.uk or telephone **020 7808 2777** (Chelsea) / **020 8661 3006** (Sutton) with your ideas.

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