Your feelings when you finish treatment for blood cancer

When you finish treatment, it can be a difficult time, and you might not feel how you expected to. On this webpage we cover some of the emotions you might feel, suggestions to help you cope and where to get support.

Summary

- Finishing treatment for blood cancer can be a difficult time.
- You may not feel how you expected to, or struggle to process what you have been through and adjust to a 'new normal'. You may feel some of these emotions but not others. However you feel is OK.
- Everybody copes with their feelings differently.
- If you're feeling low, it can seem that nothing will help. But there are things you can try that might help you feel a bit better.

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Factsheet: Your feelings when you finish blood cancer treatment

Your feelings and emotions

Not everyone is the same. Finishing treatment affects everybody differently. You may experience some of these emotions but not others, or you may feel other emotions altogether. You might feel different things at different times. There is no right or wrong way to feel. However you feel is OK even if you are confused about your emotions.

Finishing treatment for blood cancer can be an unsettling time.

It's common to not feel how you expected to. You might have thought you would be relieved or happy to go back to normal – and some people are. But finishing treatment can feel anti-climactic. Not feeling how you thought you would can leave you feeling lost.

> "The day I got those final results should have been a day of happiness and celebration, but when the doctor told me I was in complete remission I felt nothing."
>
> *— Esther, diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) in 2020*

Your family and friends may be happy for you and expect you to feel like this too, which can be difficult. You may feel like you have to be strong for them or try and 'crack on' with things. Some people tell us this can leave them feeling alone and like no one understands what they are going through.

> "I strongly believe that once your 'active treatment' is over people expect you to be back to 'normal' and that the mental health side of things is not taken as seriously as the physical side."
>
> *— Emma, diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia (AML) in 2024*

You might have expected life to go back to the way it was before. But this may not be the case. You might feel differently about what is important to you, or want to make some changes. You may have side effects to cope with and appointments to go to. This can be difficult for you and those around you.

These changes can leave you grieving the life you used to have. You might feel upset if you can no longer do the things you did before, or if you struggle more than you used to. You may worry about the future.

It takes time to adjust to how you feel and what your body can cope with. Be patient with yourself.

> "The cancer may have gone but our lives are still impacted daily by the devastation it has caused to our bodies."
>
> *— Ellen, diagnosed with acute promyelocytic leukaemia (APL) in 2005*

If you started treatment soon after being diagnosed, you may have felt like you were in 'survivor mode' with no time to process things. Some people tell us that they only started to process what they had been through after finishing treatment.

> "It was as if in that moment my brain had suddenly caught up with what had happened to my body."
>
> — *Esther, diagnosed with AML in 2020*

It can also feel unsettling not to have as much contact with your doctors and nurses. You may feel anxious or scared at first. You may feel like you no longer have that support network to share your fears, worries or concerns about your cancer. Remember, your team are still there for you if you need them. Ask them how you can contact them if you need to.

> "Whilst you're in hospital you are in a 'protective bubble' and getting used to being outside that is difficult, but the biggest thing I realised is recovery is not linear."
>
> — *Emma, diagnosed with AML in 2024*

Some people tell us they feel 'survivor's guilt' for making it through treatment when other may not. This can make you feel that you have to be happy or appreciative of life all the time. You are allowed to feel how you feel. You have been through a lot. You can feel happy to have got through it but still feel a mix of challenging emotions too.

> "A friend described it perfectly – it was as if you'd been away to war – everyone thinks you should be happy to be back alive but no-one really understands the trauma you've experienced…"
>
> — *Esther, diagnosed with AML in 2020*

It's also natural to feel anxious or scared about the cancer coming back. You might feel this before appointments or if you get new symptoms. Over time, it usually gets easier.

> "Of course, I feel a degree of anxiety whenever I go for my check-ups, but most of the time, I don't even think about it."
>
> — *Paul, living with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) since 2016*

You may also have lost your self-confidence especially if you have side effects from treatment like losing or gaining weight or losing your hair. You may also feel less confident if you've been unable to work or look after your family for some time.

Even if you don't have physical changes, or these get better over time, you might not feel like yourself. You might feel less independent. You may have a different role in your family

or at work. Some people tell us they find it harder to socialise and meet friends, especially when coping with side effects like fatigue. It can take time before you feel like yourself again. It's important to be kind and patient with yourself.

You might be feeling low or sad, which is understandable. But if you feel hopeless, you lose interest or pleasure in life, or you feel low for several weeks, you may have depression. If you are struggling, try speaking to someone and getting support.

> **If you think you might be depressed, contact your GP or nurse specialist. They can help you access the support and treatment that you need. This could be lifestyle changes, talking therapy or antidepressants.**

If you need urgent mental health support, call 111 and select the mental health option.

Of course, there are also lots of positives to stopping treatment too. You may feel relieved and hopeful for the future. Knowing that you won't have to stay in hospital or deal with treatment might be something you are looking forward to.

> "It was an amazing feeling, a relief. I didn't care that I had no hair."
>
> — *Sue, diagnosed with AML in 2021*

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Adjusting to a new normal

Life after treatment usually involves a lot of change. Some people call this finding their 'new normal'.

There are some things you might have done before that you can try and slowly ease yourself into. This could include:

- Working or supporting your family
- Doing activities or hobbies that you used to
- Spending more time with family, friends and loved ones

Adjusting to a new normal can take time. You may still do the things that are important to you, it just may look different to before you had cancer. Be kind and patient with yourself, you will get there.

> "I stopped calling it a journey and now refer to it as my rollercoaster and once I accepted my life was going to be very different in so many ways I was able to look at things differently."
>
> — *Emma, diagnosed with AML in 2024*

Take things a day at a time

Try not to put pressure on yourself to find your 'new normal'. It takes time and it's important to be patient with yourself. Try not to expect too much of yourself, remember you will have good days and bad days. It can help to take things a day at a time, bit by bit. This can help you focus on the here and now.

> "Plan for the future, live for today."
>
> — *Emma, diagnosed with AML in 2024*

Build your self confidence

After treatment you might no longer feel like your usual self. This can knock your self-confidence.

> "Throughout this time people commented on how well I looked – which just isn't helpful at times!"
>
> — *Bethan, living with CLL since 2015 and relapsed in 2022*

You might no longer be able to do the things you did before, like work or certain hobbies. This can affect how you might feel about yourself. It can be difficult if you don't know how to fill your time. Some people tell us that volunteering helps them feel a sense of purpose.

Doing things with your friends and family can help. It can be daunting to start going out and socialising again. You might have fatigue, which can make this even more difficult. Spend time with others in ways that work for you. If you're not feeling up to going out, you could have people come round to relax with you instead. Even just catching up over the

phone or video call can help you feel less lonely. Often, being around loved ones and those that care about you can help.

> "After shielding before, during and for 6 months after treatment I became increasingly anxious about going out. With some help from the Cancer Psychology Team at my hospital I am now back to my 'normal' pre planning and enjoying being out and about."
>
> *— Jane, living with CLL since 2004*

If you're struggling to adapt to changes in your appearance, you might find it helpful to say positive things that you like about yourself in the mirror. Maybe you like your eyes, your smile or your laughter. You could also place sticky notes with kind messages to yourself on your mirror to help you get through it.

- Macmillan and Cancer Research UK have more information about coping with changes in your appearance.
- Look Good Feel Better run workshops and offer information and support to help people manage the cosmetic and physical impact of treatment.
- Cancer Hair Care offer information and support around hair loss and cancer.

Look after yourself

It's important to look after yourself physically too. Taking care of your diet and exercise can help you feel more in control and better about life.

Try to eat a well-balanced diet. This should help you feel stronger, have more energy and better manage any side effects you have.

Staying active can improve your wellbeing, quality of life and physical health. Exercise can also help you deal with your emotions. You don't have to overexert yourself, even a gentle walk can help. Choose a level of exercise that works for you and how you are feeling.

Take it slowly. Gradually adding in healthier food options and gentle exercise can help you adjust to your 'new normal'.

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Coping with your feelings

Adapting to life after treatment and learning to cope with your feelings can be difficult. Once you start to settle into things, you may still have good days and bad days. It can take time to adjust, but people tell us it gets easier over time. It is important to be kind and patient with yourself through it all.

> "I have accepted that no two people with blood cancers have the same recovery story and once I stopped comparing it became easier."
>
> — *Emma, diagnosed with AML in 2024*

It can be difficult if you are struggling to adapt, feel less supported or feel pressure to be happy. Everybody copes with their feelings differently. There is no right or wrong way to manage your feelings. If you're feeling low, it can seem that nothing will help. But there are things you can try that might help you feel a bit better.

> "Everyday will bring something new; the journey is like a rollercoaster. Ensure you reach out for all the support available and don't suffer in silence."
>
> — *Elliot, diagnosed with chronic myelomonocytic leukaemia (CMML) in 2023*

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Where to get support

Coping when blood cancer treatment stops can be difficult. You may need support from:

- Your healthcare team
- Family and friends
- Leukaemia Care
- Other charities

We are here to support you

Our support services include:



Buddy service, where you are matched with someone who's had a similar experience to you



Support groups, which offer a safe place to share your feelings with people who understand



Online support, including Facebook communities where you can connect with other people who know what it's like when treatment finishes



Counselling service, where you can access up to six sessions of in-person or online counselling, free of charge

We have more information on how to cope with your feelings and where to get support.

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Need support?

You are not alone. We're here for you whether you have a diagnosis yourself or know someone who has. If you'd like advice, support, or a listening ear, call our freephone helpline on 08088 010 444 or send a WhatsApp message to 07500 068 065.

Helpline and WhatsApp →

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