



Caring for someone with cancer

Caring for someone with cancer

This booklet has information on:

- Medical, practical and emotional care
- How to talk to someone with cancer
- Looking after yourself
- Carers' entitlements
- Supports for you and your loved one

“ It made me happy caring for him after all he did for me. I got to spend precious time with Dad, which I will remember forever. ”

Useful numbers

Specialist nurse

Family doctor (GP)

Consultant

Medical social worker

Community/public health nurse

Homecare team

Emergency number



Contents

Being a carer	5
Medical care	13
Practical care	25
Emotional care	33
How to talk to someone with cancer	41
Taking care of yourself	65
Coping with your emotions	77
Caring for someone with advanced cancer	93
Life after caring	103
Support resources	109

We're here for you

If you or your family have any questions or worries, want to know where to get support, or if you just need to talk, you can talk to one of our Cancer Nurses in confidence.

Ways to get in touch

- Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700
- Visit a Daffodil Centre.
Email daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie to find your local Daffodil Centre.
- Email us: supportline@irishcancer.ie

See page 115 for more about our services and how to find your nearest Daffodil Centre. You can also visit our website at www.cancer.ie for more information.



I'm so glad I could be my mam's carer.
I wouldn't have it any other way.
She cared for me for long enough.
I wanted to give back.



Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

Being a carer

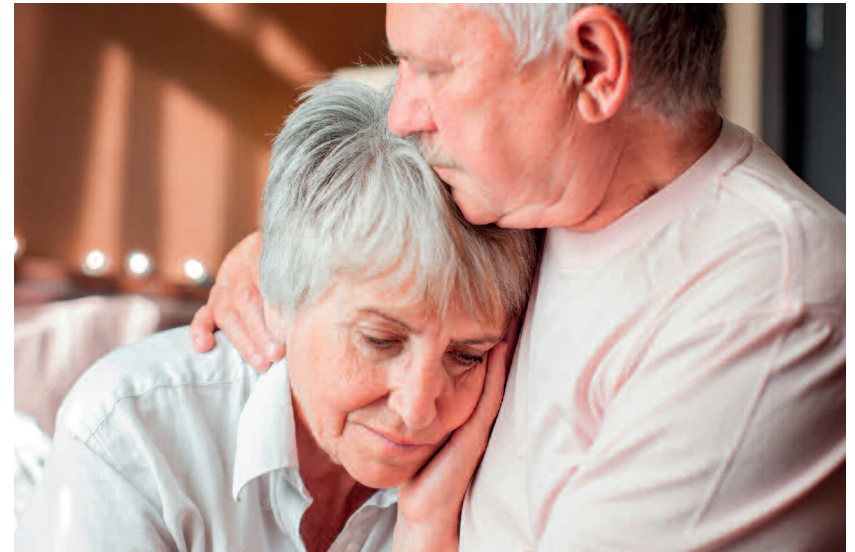
What does a carer do?	7
How does it feel to be a carer?	8
Young carers	8
Advice for carers	9
Support for carers	10

What does a carer do?

A carer is someone who helps a person with cancer. This may include:

- **Helping with medical care.** For example, helping to manage medications, keeping track of hospital appointments and providing nursing (personal) care, such as helping the person to wash or dress.
- **Helping with activities of daily living,** such as cooking, shopping and housework.
- **Supporting them emotionally.**
- **Dealing with practical matters,** such as managing money or even talking to other people on their behalf.

A carer could be a family member, partner, friend or neighbour. They often know the most about the person with cancer and care very deeply about them. A carer is also often the link between the person with cancer and other people caring for them, such as their medical team.



How does it feel to be a carer?

Caring can be a special time that brings you and your loved ones closer together. Some people get a lot of satisfaction from helping their loved one when they are sick.

The caring role can also be challenging, both physically and emotionally. At times you may feel overwhelmed by caring.

If other people offer help, accept it rather than trying to do everything yourself. It's important to get help if you are finding it hard to cope. See page 10 for more on support for carers.

Young carers

Life may be very different if your parent has been diagnosed with cancer. Being a carer can feel overwhelming, especially with all the new information you have to learn. You may feel you have less in common with your friends. This may make you feel isolated and frustrated. You may have a lot of strong feelings and emotions. This is not uncommon and you are not alone.

Talking about how you're feeling and getting advice, information and support can help you to feel and cope better. Making contact with other young people going through a similar situation can also help.

You can talk to one of our Cancer Nurses in confidence if you have any worries or questions, or if you need help getting support. You can call us on Freephone 1800 200 700 or email us on supportline@irishcancer.ie. You can also find out more on our website www.cancer.ie by searching 'young carers'.

Advice for carers

- **Get organised.** Try to divide up the caring and other practical and financial jobs so that everyone can help and you are supported from the start.
- **Accept help.** If people don't offer help, don't be afraid to ask. Suggest specific jobs that others can do and let them know how much you appreciate their help.
- **Look after yourself.** Don't forget to take care of your own physical and emotional health.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Don't expect too much from yourself. Caring can be hard. You are doing a wonderful thing by taking on this role. You can only do your best.
- **Take time out – and don't feel guilty about it!** It's good for you and the person you are caring for if you get regular breaks from the demands of being a carer. It may be possible to access a Carer's Support Grant to enable you to take a break from caring (see page 74).
- **Connect with other carers.** Join a support group or online community. It can be really helpful to talk to other people in a similar situation.



Support for carers

Support is available from:

- Your GP
- Local cancer support centres
- Carer organisations such as Family Carers Ireland and Care Alliance Ireland
- Counsellors
- Online communities
- Cancer support groups

You can also speak to one of our Cancer Nurses by calling 1800 200 700, emailing supportline@irishcancer.ie or visiting a Daffodil Centre.



My caring story

“ I cared for my dad who had non-small-cell lung cancer. Dad didn't really want others apart from immediate family helping out with care, so we managed it ourselves mostly. My mother wanted to do a lot of it herself. She refused home help and we respected her decision, although we may not have all agreed with it.

Two aunts cooked dinners every week for us, which was great. Also, neighbours used to just drop off food and not stay. You remember those people and what they did to help in their own way.

For my dad, he just wanted to watch TV, chat a bit and us to be there to help him when needed. No fussing needed. I took time off work to be there as much as I could.

I found it hard talking to him about his illness as he didn't really want to discuss it. I also found it hard dealing with all the visitors and tried to put some rules on visits, but my mother wanted everyone to call in. There were lots of small arguments and sometimes it got to me.

Being a carer was very tiring on the body. I slept in the room with him a lot of the time so my sleep was broken. Your life is changed totally while caring and I think others don't really get it unless they have been through it. I met friends for coffee once or twice a week just to talk about it with someone other than family. That really helped me.

It made me happy caring for him after all he did for me. I got to spend precious time with Dad which I will remember forever. ”

It can be hard to manage all the different types of care, especially if you don't feel confident about taking on these responsibilities. For example, a lot of people feel nervous about providing medical care. However, you may surprise yourself with how much you are able to do.



Money matters

You may need to take care of financial matters like dealing with health insurers or finding out about entitlements and benefits. See page 32 for more on dealing with money matters.

Medical care

Medical care	15
Giving nursing care (personal care)	17
Managing medications	19
Managing side-effects	21
Reporting problems to the medical team	23
Confidentiality and sharing information	24

Medical care

A carer is an important part of a person's healthcare team. They may have to:

- Keep track of tests, treatments and appointments.
- Make sure their loved one attends appointments.
- Communicate with different healthcare professionals about their loved one.

Lots of carers feel nervous or overwhelmed about helping with medical care, but there are some things you can do that will help you feel more confident.



Learn about cancer

- Try to learn about your loved one's cancer, treatments and possible side-effects and symptoms. Get to know some of the medical terms that the doctors and nurses use.

- **Be careful with online information.** It might be hard to understand or it might be incorrect. Also, the information may not really apply to your loved one's situation or the particular cancer they have. Ask their doctor or nurse for recommended websites.
- **Ask the person you are caring for if they would like you to be noted on their healthcare record** for information-sharing purposes.
- **Write down any questions you have and bring them to hospital appointments** so you can ask the medical team.
- **Get in touch with our Cancer Nurses if you have any questions.** Call the Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700, email supportline@irishcancer.ie or visit a Daffodil Centre. Our nurses can also send you our booklets on different cancer types, treatments and side-effects. These can help you to understand your loved one's illness better. Or visit www.cancer.ie for online cancer information or to download booklets.



Ask for advice

Ask the hospital doctors, nurses and other relevant healthcare professionals, such as the physiotherapist and dietitian, for advice on how to care for your loved one. Make sure you understand about any medication they need to take (see page 19). If they need dressings for wounds, injections or other medical care, the nurses can advise you on what to do or where to go.

If you feel comfortable, the nurses will teach you how to give medical care. If not, they will explain what services are available in the community. For example, the family doctor (GP) or the community or public health nurse.



Giving nursing care (personal care)

As a carer, you will probably need to look after some of the day-to-day nursing needs of your loved one. For example, you may help them to wash or get dressed. It's important to ask them what help they would like. They know best and may not be comfortable with intimate contact. They may prefer to have a private nurse or carer if they need personal care at home.

Hints and tips: Personal care

- **Regular washing can help someone feel more comfortable and lift their mood.** It may also help prevent infections. If you need help with bathing your loved one, talk to the public health nurse or community nurse.
- **Suggest that your loved one wears clothes that are easy to put on and take off,** such as trousers or skirts with elasticated waistbands, clothes with fastenings and slip-on shoes.
- **Ask the public health nurse, community nurse or your pharmacist about special devices to help with personal care,** such as hair-washing trays.
- **Look for mobile services like beauticians and hairdressers.** Having a haircut or a beauty treatment may give your loved one a boost if they can't get out of the house easily.
- **Check with the hospital about suitable creams, shampoos and other skin-related products.** Treatments like chemotherapy and radiotherapy can sometimes make skin extra sensitive.
- **Tell the public health nurse, community nurse or GP if your loved one finds it difficult to get to the toilet or to use the toilet.** They may be able to arrange equipment to help.
- **If your loved one has problems with incontinence, talk to the public health nurse or community nurse about supplies like pads and protective bedding.** They may also be able to direct you to an incontinence advice service. Your local pharmacist may also be able to tell you about products that might help.
- **If your loved one is spending a lot of time in bed, or their balance or mobility is affected by their cancer or the treatment they've had, they may be at risk of falling.** Ask the GP, public health nurse or community nurse for advice on preventing falls and what to do if your loved one falls. You might hurt yourself or them if you try to lift them.

Managing medications

Often carers help with medication. Your loved one may have a lot of medications to take. Some may need to be taken regularly and others may be taken as they are needed. Here are some tips to help you.

- **Try to talk to the healthcare team in the hospital so you understand the medication.**
 - What medicines have been prescribed?
 - What are they for?
 - When should they be taken?
 - What is the dose?
 - How should the medicine be taken, with food or on an empty stomach?
 - Will there be any side-effects?
 - How long should it take to work?
 - Is there a risk of interactions with other medicines, supplements, vitamins, alcohol or foods?
 - What if a dose is missed? Is it best to take it when remembered or wait until the next dose is due?

Ask at the hospital for a printout with information about the medicine, which you can take home. You can also ask your local pharmacist about medicines. They can be a great help, especially if your loved one is on a complex medicine regime.

- **Find a way to keep track of their medicines.** For example, use a chart so you can write which pills/medicine they need every day and cross off when each dose has been taken. Or use a weekly pill box, so you can fill it with the pills needed at different times every day. You could also ask your pharmacist if they can pre-pack ('blister pack') medications for you, dividing tablets into separate compartments for each time of each day. There may be a fee for this.

- **Make sure your loved one doesn't run out of medication.** Keep an eye on supplies and take the prescription to the pharmacist in good time.
- **See if their local pharmacist has a home-delivery service.** Or you could leave your prescription in the pharmacy and call ahead so that the medicines will be ready for you to collect.
- **Ask their pharmacist about registering for the Drugs Payment Scheme.** This limits the amount a person pays for prescribed medicines and medical equipment (appliances) every month. They may also be able to advise you about other benefits like the medical card. Medical social workers can help with medical card applications. You can also get information from the HSE. Visit www.hse.ie, call the HSE Live helpline on 1800 700 700 or visit your local health office.
- **Keep the receipts for medical costs if your loved one will be claiming back expenses** from their private health insurer or through their annual tax return.



Managing side-effects

If your loved one is having side-effects as a result of their treatment, speak to the nurses and doctors in the hospital. Try to get contact details for the person you should contact if you need help with managing side-effects.

There are medications and other treatments to help with many side-effects, which the hospital team can recommend. If one treatment doesn't help, ask if there is something else your loved one can try.

It may also be helpful to keep a record of any side-effects, so you have it for future reference. You can also speak to a cancer nurse by calling our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or by visiting a Daffodil Centre.

We have useful booklets on different cancer types, their treatments and possible side-effects. For free booklets, ring our Support Line, pick up a copy from a Daffodil Centre or download them from the publications section on our website, www.cancer.ie



Hints and tips: Going to hospital appointments

- **Appointments may make your loved one very anxious,** especially if test results or treatment decisions are going to be discussed. For this reason, try to go to appointments with your loved one. If the appointment is over the phone or by video call, stay in the room with them if you can.
- **Chat to your loved one before the appointment and see if they have any questions or worries.** Write these down, along with your own questions, so that you don't forget anything.
- **Make a note of what the doctor says.** Keeping a record of what the doctor says will help you to share information with the rest of the family or friends afterwards. Some doctors may be happy for you to record the meeting, but make sure you ask for their permission before doing so.
- **Time with the doctor is very important for your loved one.** The doctor may be busy but try not to feel rushed. Make sure you are happy that you and your loved one have asked all your questions and have all the information you need before you leave.



Reporting problems to the medical team

Find out who's who

Find out who is on the medical team and what help they can give you. For example, the consultant, registrar, specialist nurse, occupational therapist, medical social worker or physiotherapist.

Get telephone numbers

Keep a record of important names and phone numbers. Ask the nurses in the hospital for a phone number in case you need to ask a question between appointments. Also write down who to call if your loved one becomes unwell at home or if they need out-of-hours care. Make sure the list of numbers is easily available so that anyone caring for your loved one knows where to find them.

Don't be afraid to call

If you're worried about your loved one's health or if they're troubled by a side-effect or symptom, let a member of their medical team know.

If your loved one needs to go into hospital urgently

Make sure they have everything they need for a stay in hospital, including any medicines they are taking (including non-cancer related ones). It may be helpful to have an overnight bag ready, packed with a few essentials. Let other carers and healthcare professionals know that your loved one is in hospital.

“ Get involved early. I missed appointments at the start when they were deciding treatment, which I regret. Make sure to support them during treatment as they really need it. ”

Confidentiality and sharing information

Getting information

There may be limits on how much information health and social care professionals can share with you about your loved one, especially if you are not a family member. If the person you care for would like professionals to share information with you, they should let the professionals know this. If written permission is needed, ask at the hospital how to do this. Keep a copy of the document for your own files.

You can ask professionals for general advice. For example, 'What's the best way to manage nausea from chemotherapy?'

If you have been nominated as a co-decision maker or a decision-making representative under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 for your loved one, you should notify the medical team involved in your loved one's care. You should also request that this is recorded on their healthcare record.



Sharing information

Let your loved one's healthcare team know that you are their carer. You can share information about the patient that might be helpful to them, as long as your loved one is happy for you to do this.

Practical care

Practical care	27
Household chores	28
Home Support Service	29
Transport Service	30
Medical equipment	31
Dealing with money matters	31

Practical care

There can be a lot of practical work involved in caring. This may include household chores, bringing your loved one to and from appointments and dealing with financial matters.

Sometimes these roles can be overwhelming, especially if you have other responsibilities such as running your own home, looking after children or going to work.

Write a list of all the jobs that need to be done. That way, you can prioritise the most important jobs. A list will also help you to share out the jobs with other carers who are looking after your loved one. See page 85 for tips on working together.



Household chores

Household chores may involve cleaning, shopping and preparing meals. Ask your loved one what practical help they would like around the house. They may be entitled to help under the Home Support Service (see next page), so speak to the medical social worker in the hospital or their local HSE office. You can also ring the HSE Live helpline on 1800 700 700.



Preparing meals

If your loved one isn't feeling well, or is having side-effects after their treatment, they may not have much appetite or interest in preparing food. Or they may need a special diet, such as a soft diet or a high-calorie diet. Ask to speak to the hospital dietitian if you have any questions about preparing food. You could also read our booklet ***Understanding diet and cancer***. It has helpful tips about meals for someone with cancer.

If you're very busy as a carer, ask others to bring meals in plastic containers that you can use or freeze for later. Stocking up on some good quality, nutritious ready meals or using a healthy meal-delivery service can also help.

Home Support Service

This HSE scheme is for people aged 65 and older who need to be cared for in their own homes. It can reduce the amount of physical and practical care that you have to give to your loved one. It is also possible to access packages of care for those under the age of 65 who have care needs due to their cancer. These packages of care are also provided by the HSE.

If your loved one is being discharged from hospital, make sure you ask the medical social worker in the hospital about a home support package. If there is no medical social worker in the hospital, then ask to see the discharge coordinator and ask them about referral to this service. If your loved one is already at home, ask your community nurse or public health nurse about this service.

In addition to the services of professional carers, referrals can be made to relevant nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and home helps, where available.

Your loved one might also receive some respite care or aids/medical equipment (appliances) as part of the package if these are needed to support them to stay in their own home. The services that are supplied will depend on your loved one's individual needs, the level of support available from you and others, and where in the country they live. This will be assessed by the HSE and the team involved in their care.

Check with your local health office for more details about this service. You may also be able to access free caring supports, including respite and palliative care, if you discuss your loved one's needs with a public health nurse in a local health centre. To find your loved one's local health office or local health centre, call HSE Live on 1800 700 700.

Transport Service

Carers often support their loved ones by bringing them to hospital for appointments and treatment. However, if this is not possible, help is available. The Irish Cancer Society provides transport and limited financial grants for patients in need who are in cancer treatment.

- Transport is available to patients having chemotherapy treatments in our partner hospitals, who are having difficulty getting to and from their local appointments.
- We have recently opened a pilot service for radiotherapy patients attending University Hospital Cork and the Bons Secours Hospital, Cork for treatment.
- Travel2Care is a fund for patients who are having difficulty getting to and from their diagnostic test appointments or cancer treatments. Patients can apply for the fund if they are travelling over 50km one way to a national designated cancer centre or satellite centre. Travel2Care is made available by the National Cancer Control Programme.

See page 121 for more details or talk to one of our Cancer Nurses. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700, email the nurses at supportline@irishcancer.ie or visit a Daffodil Centre. You can also ask the medical social worker at the hospital for more information on these services or whether there are any HSE transport options in your area.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Medical equipment

If your loved one needs medical equipment, such as a wheelchair or walker, speak to their hospital nurse, public health nurse, occupational therapist or the medical social worker at the hospital. They will advise you.



Dealing with money matters

Money may be the last thing on your mind if your loved one has been diagnosed with cancer, but it can make things easier in the long run if you get organised from the start. There are tips on how to deal with money matters on the next page.

Hints and tips: Dealing with money matters

- **If you find it difficult to deal with financial matters or to fill in forms, ask a friend or family member to help.**
- **Find out if there is a medical social worker at the hospital and ask to speak to them.** They can give you advice about benefits and allowances to apply for and supports and services that are available.
- **Ask about any costs and charges when your loved one is first admitted to hospital,** to see if they will have to pay anything. In some circumstances your loved one may be able to have their hospital charges waived. Again, talk to the medical social worker about this.
- **If your loved one has private health insurance, it's a good idea to call the insurer as soon as possible** to find out what tests and treatment are covered under their plan. You will need permission from your loved one so that you can talk to the health insurer on their behalf.
- **Ask your pharmacist or the medical social worker about medical cards,** the Drugs Payment Scheme and the Long-Term Illness Scheme.
- **Keep a folder for receipts** if your loved one will be claiming back any medical costs from their private health insurer or as part of a tax return.
- **Your local Intreo (social welfare) office can give you advice about applying for benefits** that you or your loved one may be entitled to if you have to give up work, as well as other illness-related payments, such as Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit. Your local Citizens Information Centre can also provide information on benefits and entitlements. For more on carers' entitlements, see page 73.

Emotional care

Emotional care	35
Reactions to a cancer diagnosis	36
Getting support for your loved one	38
Complementary therapies	39
Keeping life as normal as possible	40
Caring for a child with cancer	40

Emotional care

Knowing how your loved one is feeling and what you can say or do to help is often difficult. You know your loved one best so don't be afraid to talk to them. Sharing your feelings can bring you both a lot of comfort.



When talking with your loved one about their illness, it can be tempting to try to 'solve' their problems. You can't change the fact that they are sick, but you can help them a lot just by listening to them. Try to find out how they're feeling and if they're worried about anything in particular, such as upcoming tests or treatment. If you think they need professional help to cope, speak to their healthcare team.

See 'How to talk to someone with cancer' on page 41 for more about talking to your loved one and how to be a good listener.

“ Don't be afraid to talk to your loved one about their illness. They will be reassured that you are trying to understand what they are going through. ”

Reactions to a cancer diagnosis

You may be surprised at how your loved one reacts to their cancer diagnosis. It's normal for people to cope in many different ways. Sadness, anger, anxiety and denial are all common reactions.



“ It's a tough time, but being with him was so special. ”

Different feelings at different times

It's normal for your loved one to experience different feelings during the course of their illness. It can be hard for you if you don't know what to expect. The following stages may be challenging for your loved one:

- After diagnosis
- Waiting for test results
- Before a follow-up appointment
- When treatment is finished
- If the cancer returns after treatment
- If the treatment has not worked or they decide to stop treatment

Your main role is to support your loved one, not to change how they feel. Listening and trying to accept how they feel will show that you really support them.



You will also have your own reactions. See page 77 for more about coping with your emotions.

See also our booklet, ***Understanding the emotional effects of cancer***, which you can order through our Support Line 1800 700 200 or download from our website, **www.cancer.ie**

Getting support for your loved one

There's a lot of support available for people with cancer. This includes cancer support centres, support groups for different types of cancers, counsellors, booklets and online forums. See page 115 for more about free supports and services from the Irish Cancer Society. You can help your loved one by finding out what's available in your area. Some hospitals have a Daffodil Centre where you can speak to one of our Cancer Nurses. See page 116 for more about Daffodil Centres.



If you are concerned that your loved one is having difficulty coping with their illness, speak to their doctors, nurses or medical social worker. Some hospitals have a psycho-oncology team. These are specialists in psychological care and support for cancer patients. Usually the team includes psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and nurses. Ask if there is a psycho-oncology service available at your loved one's hospital. You can also contact our Cancer Nurses for information on support services, including free counselling. Call 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre.

“ Just be yourself around the patient. They are still the same person. Respect their wishes and don't treat them any different to before their illness. ”



Complementary therapies

Some people find that complementary therapies such as massage, exercise-based activities, mindfulness and yoga help them to feel better in themselves during and after treatment. Check with the hospital before using complementary therapies to make sure it is safe to use them. For more information, see our booklet ***Understanding cancer and complementary therapies***. You can get a copy by calling our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or from a Daffodil Centre. You can also read it or download it at www.cancer.ie

Keeping life as normal as possible

Cancer will have a big impact on your loved one's life, but try not to let it take over. They are still the same person. Try to keep living as normally as possible. Remember to include your loved one in special activities like birthday celebrations or other events and outings. Everyone needs something to look forward to and doing normal things can be a welcome break from thinking about their illness. Some people may use humour to help them cope, which can bring some light relief to difficult situations. Try to follow your loved one's lead on this.

Caring for a child with cancer

Sometimes being a carer means looking after children affected by cancer. For more information on this, see our children's cancer section on www.cancer.ie

Our booklet, *Children and young people with cancer: A guide for parents*, may help. It contains information on lots of topics including types of treatments and side-effects; feelings and emotions; effects on brothers and sisters and support resources.

Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre for a free copy. You can also download the booklet from our website, www.cancer.ie

Our Children's Cancer Nurse is in Children's Health Ireland (CHI) in Crumlin one day a week to provide free and confidential advice, support and information to anyone affected by a child's cancer. She will be around the playrooms, wards and clinic areas. See the in-hospital posters for times and days.

The medical social worker involved in your child's care can also give you information on supports, services and entitlements.

How to talk to someone with cancer

How to talk to someone with cancer	43
Why talk, why listen?	46
Obstacles to talking	50
How to be a good listener	52
Understand what they are facing	61

How to talk to someone with cancer



You're not alone

“ I bumped into John in the lobby of the hospital. I was a student and my family and John's family had been friends for as long as I could remember. Now John's mother had been admitted to hospital and was found to have cancer of the kidney. John was sitting downstairs in the lobby looking very upset. I asked him whether he was on his way up to see his mother. 'I've been sitting here for half an hour,' he said. 'I want to go and see her, but I'm stuck. I don't know what to say. ”

That story explains how many of us feel when someone we love has been told they have cancer. It is important to know that what you are feeling is normal and that you are not alone.

You may feel stuck, helpless or lost for words when a loved one receives bad news. You may feel that you don't know what to say or you may wonder if there are things you should be saying that would make it easier for the person with cancer. You might also be afraid of saying something that would add to your loved one's upset.



There are ways to overcome these feelings so that you can give practical and useful support.

An important thing to remember is that there are no magic formulas, phrases or approaches that you should be using. There isn't a 'right' thing to say or way to act. Your desire to help your loved one is the most important thing.

Another important point is that most of us feel that we don't know what to say. But the important bit is not what we say – it's that we are there and we are listening. The single most important thing that you can do for your loved one with cancer is to listen. Once you've learned the simple rules of good listening, this will help you to support your loved one. Learning how to be a good listener begins with understanding why listening and talking are so valuable.

The word 'cancer'

For most people, when they are told they have cancer, the diagnosis seems to bring a unique sense of fear. The patient's relatives and friends, and sometimes their doctors and nurses, may have similar feelings.

The emotional reaction many people have to hearing the word 'cancer' can make it harder to talk about. Check that your loved one is comfortable using the word cancer. Sometimes people find it difficult to say or hear the word out loud.

The good news is that new treatments are more effective than ever at treating and controlling cancer. Many people are treated successfully and many others live with cancer for a long time. Your loved one may find this reassuring.

You don't have to have all the answers.
Listening to the questions can help a lot.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Why talk, why listen?

There are 3 very good reasons for talking and listening:

1. Talking to each other is the best way to communicate

There are many ways of communicating – kissing, touching, laughing, frowning, even ‘not talking’. However, talking is the most efficient and most specific way of communicating. Other methods of communication are still important, but for them to be of use, you usually have to talk first.



2. Talking about distress can help to relieve it

There are many reasons for us to talk. There are obvious ones, for example, asking for information or warning somebody about a potential danger, such as if a child was about to touch a hot stove. But there are also less obvious reasons for talking. Sometimes, people talk because they want to get something off their chest, especially if things have gone wrong. This can help to release some stress. You can provide relief to your loved one by allowing them to talk and listening to what they have to say. This can help your loved one even if you don't have all the answers.

The idea of ‘good listening’ has been proven to be helpful. As part of a study in the US, a group of people were taught simple listening techniques. Volunteer patients then came to see them and talk about their problems. The listeners were not allowed to do or say anything, except nod and say ‘I see’ or ‘tell me more’.

At the end of the hour, almost all of the patients said they had got very good help and support. Some of them even rang the ‘therapists’ afterwards to thank them and ask if they could see them again.



3. Sharing thoughts and feelings can help

It can be hard to know what to say when someone close to you is diagnosed with cancer. It may seem best to pretend that everything is fine and carry on as normal. You may not want to add to the person's worry by seeming afraid or by saying the wrong thing.

Studies by psychologists have shown that conversations between people with a terminal illness and their relatives and friends did not create new fears and anxieties. In fact, the opposite was true. Not talking about a fear made it feel bigger.

People who have nobody to talk to are more likely to be anxious and depressed. Research has also shown that when people are seriously ill, one of their biggest problems is that other people don't talk to them. Feelings of isolation can add a great deal to their burden. Often, if a major anxiety is occupying someone's mind, that person may find it difficult to talk about anything else.

One of the reasons that people bottle up their feelings about having cancer is shame. Many people are ashamed of some of their feelings, particularly their fears and anxieties. They are afraid of something but feel that they are not 'supposed' to be, so they become ashamed of themselves.



People who have nobody to talk to can become anxious and depressed.

One of the best way to help your loved one is to listen to their fears and stay close when you've heard them. By not backing away, you show that you accept and understand them. This will help to reduce your loved one's fear and shame.

You have everything to gain and nothing to lose by trying to talk to someone who has been told they have cancer. Starting a conversation in these circumstances may feel awkward and embarrassing, but there are ways to deal with this.



Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

Obstacles to talking

There can be a number of obstacles to communication between you and the person who has cancer. These are:

- The person with cancer wants to talk, but you don't.
- The person with cancer doesn't want to talk, but you do.
- The person with cancer wants to talk, but feels they should not.
- You don't know how to encourage the person with cancer to talk.
- The person with cancer appears not to want to talk, but really needs to.
- You don't know what is best and don't want to say anything that may make things worse.



These seem like major barriers, but don't let that alarm you. There are ways of making yourself available for listening and talking, without overwhelming your loved one. You can work out whether they want to talk by asking 1 or 2 simple questions, such as:

- How are you?
- Did you get a shock when you heard the news?
- Is there anything I can do?

Talking about bad news

You might say nothing at all because you don't know what to say. As a result, you might withhold information from the person with cancer. Try to be as open and honest as you can, even when dealing with a difficult subject like cancer.



Some families think it is better not to discuss a diagnosis or a poor prognosis. (A prognosis is information about how a disease is likely to progress.) But not talking about an illness can lead to confusion and distress. Remember, it is normal if your relative or friend gets upset if told bad news. Discussing bad news does not cause more distress. The news itself will make them upset, not you talking about it. In fact, not talking about a problem can make it seem bigger.

How to be a good listener

A lot of the most awkward gaps in communication can be solved using simple tips that encourage free conversation.

Some of these are physical, such as adjusting your body position and making eye contact. Others are more psychological, such as taking the other person's mood and personality into account.

Get the setting right

Get comfortable. Try to look relaxed even if you don't feel it. Try to signal the fact that you are there to spend some time with them. For example, take your coat off or make a cup of tea.

Keep your eyes on the same level as the person you're talking to, which almost always means sitting down. As a general rule, if your loved one is in hospital and chairs are unavailable or too low, sitting on their hospital bed is better than standing.

Try to keep the atmosphere as private as possible. Don't try to talk in a corridor or on a staircase. That may seem obvious, but often conversations go wrong because of these simple things.

Try to keep the atmosphere as private as possible.

Generally, there should be a comfortable amount of space between you and the person you are talking to. A longer distance between you can make conversation feel awkward and formal. A shorter distance can make the other person feel trapped, particularly if they are in bed and cannot back away. Try to make sure there are no desks or bedside tables between you. That may not be easy, but you could say something like: 'It's not very easy to talk across this table. Can I move it aside for a moment?'

Keep looking at the person while they are talking and while you talk. Eye contact tells the other person that the conversation is just between the 2 of you. If there are moments when you find it hard to keep eye contact, try to stay close and hold the person's hand or give a reassuring touch if you can.



Find out if the person who is ill wants to talk

It may be that your loved one is simply not in the mood to talk to you that day. It's also possible that they may want to talk about ordinary things, such as television programmes or sports events. If that is the case, go with the flow and meet them where they are.

Even if you are prepared for a major conversation with your friend, try not to be offended if they do not want that at this moment. You may still help them by being there and listening while they talk about everyday matters, or perhaps don't talk at all. If you're not sure what they want, you can always say 'Do you feel like talking?' This is always better than launching into a deep conversation (such as 'Tell me about your feelings') if they are tired or have just been talking to someone else.

And remember, some people naturally talk less than others.

Listen and show you're listening



When your loved one is talking, it's important to actively listen. This means you must be really listening to what they are saying and thinking about that. You should not be thinking about what you're going to say next or rehearsing your reply.

To listen properly, you must focus on what your loved one is saying.

Try not to interrupt – don't talk while they are talking. Wait for them to stop speaking before you start. If they interrupt you while you're saying something with a 'but' or 'I thought' or something similar, you should stop talking and let them continue.

Encourage the person with cancer to talk

Good listening doesn't mean just sitting there while another person talks. You can actually help the person who is ill talk about what's on their mind by encouraging them. Simple things work very well. Try nodding or saying things like 'Yes', 'I see' or 'What happened next?'

You can help the person who is ill talk about what's on their mind by encouraging them.

You can also show that you're hearing, and listening, by repeating 2 or 3 words from the person's last sentence. This helps the talker to feel that their words are being heard and understood. You can also repeat back to the talker what you've heard. This is partly to check that you've got it right and partly to show that you're listening and trying to understand. You can say things like 'So you mean that...' or 'If I've got that right, you feel...'

Don't be afraid of silence

If someone stops talking, it usually means that they are thinking about something painful or sensitive. Wait with them for a moment and then ask them what they were thinking about. You can hold their hand or touch them if you feel it is appropriate. Don't rush it, even if the silence seems to last for a long time. Try to be comfortable with silence as it is a natural part of the communication process.

Another point about silences is that sometimes you may think 'I don't know what to say'. This may be because there isn't anything to say. If that's the case, do not be afraid to say nothing and just stay close. A gentle touch, an arm around the shoulder or just being there can be of greater value than anything you say.

Watch for non-verbal communication

Sometimes, non-verbal communication, such as the way a person holds their body, how they move or whether they maintain eye contact, tells you much more about them than you expect. Here's one example from a doctor's experience:

“ Recently, I was looking after a middle-aged woman called Mary who seemed at first to be very angry and didn't want to talk. I tried encouraging her to talk but without much success.

During one appointment, while I was talking, I put my hand out to hers – rather tentatively because I wasn't sure it was the right thing. To my surprise, she seized it, held it tightly and wouldn't let go. The atmosphere changed suddenly and she instantly started talking about her fears of further surgery and of being abandoned by her family.

The message with non-verbal contact is 'Try it and see'. If, for example, Mary had not responded so positively, I would have been able to take my hand away and neither of us would have suffered any setback as a result of it. ”

Don't be afraid to describe your own feelings

You're allowed to say things like 'I find this difficult to talk about' or 'I'm not very good at talking about...' or even 'I don't know what to say'.

An acknowledgement of the feelings that are usually quite obvious to both of you (even if those feelings are yours rather than your friend's), can dramatically improve the atmosphere. It usually reduces the feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment that we all feel from time to time. It's remarkable how much this can improve communication.



Make sure you haven't misunderstood

If you are confident you understand what your loved one means, you can say so. Responses such as 'You sound very low' or 'I imagine that must have made you very angry' are replies that tell them that you have picked up on the emotions they have been talking about or showing. If you're not sure what they mean, then ask: 'What did that feel like?', 'What do you think of it?' or 'How do you feel now?'. Misunderstandings can arise if you make assumptions and are wrong. Something like, 'Help me understand what you mean a bit more' can be useful.

Don't change the subject



If your loved one wants to talk about how bad they feel, let them. It may be distressing for you to hear some of the things they are saying, but if you can manage it, stay with them while they talk. If you find it too uncomfortable and think you just can't handle the conversation at that moment, then you should say so. Offer to try to discuss it again later. You can even say very simple and obvious things like, 'This is making me feel very uncomfortable at the moment – can we come back to it later?' Do not change the subject without acknowledging the fact that your loved one has raised it.

If your loved one wants to talk about how bad they feel, let them.

Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

Don't give advice early

Ideally, you should not give advice unless it's asked for. If it is asked for, try not to give advice early in the conversation because it stops dialogue. If you do give advice, it's often easier to use phrases like: 'Have you thought about trying...' or 'A friend of mine once tried...' They can be better than saying 'If I were you, I'd...', which makes your friend think (or even say) 'but you're not me'. That really is a conversation stopper.

You should not give advice unless it's asked for.

Respond to humour

Many people imagine that there cannot possibly be anything to laugh about if you are seriously ill or dying. But humour can serve an important function in our way of coping with major threats and fears. It can allow us to get rid of intense feelings and to get things in perspective. Humour can be a way to deal with things that seem too difficult to deal with.



We often laugh most easily at the things we cope with least easily. We laugh at things to get them in perspective or to reduce them in size and threat.

“ One woman in her early 40s needed to have a tube (catheter) in her bladder as part of her treatment. While she was in hospital, she carried the drainage bag like a handbag and used to say loudly that it was a shame nobody made a drainage bag that matched her gloves. Out of context that may sound grim, but for this woman it was a method of dealing with a very distressing problem. It showed her bravery and desire to rise above her physical problems. ”

Laughter can help people to cope with their situation. If your loved one wants to use humour, try to go along with it. It may really help them. This does not mean that you should try and cheer them up with a supply of jokes. You can best help your friend or relative by responding sensitively to their humour, rather than trying to set the mood with your own.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

We often laugh most easily at the things we cope with least easily.

Understand what they are facing

It may help you to try to understand some of what your loved one is facing and to get a sense of the fears they may have. There are different aspects to any illness that can cause fear, but when the diagnosis is cancer, those fears may be greater. Here are some common worries or fears that they may be experiencing:

The threat to health

When we are in good health, the threat of serious illness seems far away. Very few of us think about it before it happens. When it happens to us, we may feel shocked, confused, angry or even bitter.

Uncertainty

A state of uncertainty may be even harder to deal with than bad news. Not knowing what to prepare for can be really difficult. You can help your friend a lot by simply acknowledging how unpleasant this state of uncertainty can be.

Not knowing about tests and treatments

Tests and treatments for cancer can often involve many different professionals, each with their own expertise. Your loved one may feel unskilled or even foolish in this situation. They may also feel like they have no control. You can help by acknowledging that this is a time of great uncertainty. Remind your loved one that the various professionals are trying to make an accurate assessment of their cancer so that they can come up with the best treatment plan.

Physical symptoms

As well as difficult feelings, your loved one may frequently experience physical problems. It is extremely important to acknowledge these and to help address them. At various stages in their treatment, they may experience problems such as pain, nausea and extreme fatigue. Allow them opportunities to talk about any symptoms or side-effects that are bothering them.



Visible signs of treatment or disease

Allow your loved one to acknowledge any outward signs of cancer or cancer treatment, such as hair loss. For example, you could help them to choose a wig or head scarf.

Social isolation

Most serious diseases, particularly cancer, seem to put up an invisible barrier between the person who is ill and the rest of society. Spending time with them and encouraging mutual friends to do the same is a good way to reduce that barrier.

The threat of death

Many people who have been successfully treated worry that their cancer will come back and that they might die if it does.

You can't get rid of this fear for your loved one, but it's important not to dismiss it. This could cause them more distress. Allow them to talk about it. By listening, you can reduce the impact and the pain of that threat. As always, you don't have to have all the answers. Simply listening can help a lot.



This is only a partial list, but it will at least give you an insight into what may be going through your loved one's mind. All these fears and concerns are normal and natural – what is 'wrong' or 'unnatural' is not having anybody to talk to about them. That's why you can be such an important support to your loved one.



Taking care of yourself

Get organised	67
Know your limits	68
Look after your health	69
Take time out	71
Have a care plan	72
Carers' entitlements	73

Even if you are happy to be a carer, it can be a very hard job. You may be looking after your loved one 24 hours a day and you may be doing a lot of the caring on your own. It's not unusual for carers to become tired and stressed, especially if they are putting their own needs second. Here are some tips to help you stay well when you are caring.



Get organised

Life can suddenly become very busy when a loved one becomes sick. Make a list of what needs to be done. This will help you prioritise the important things. Look for online or local courses for carers. For example, Family Carers Ireland has a number of online courses to help carers. These cover topics such as self-care, nutrition and how to cope with carer burnout. See www.familycarers.ie for more information.

Regular family meetings can ensure that everyone knows what's happening and is working together, as well as helping to form a plan. See page 85 for more about making a plan. You could also ask the medical social worker at the hospital for advice about family meetings.

Know your limits



You shouldn't have to do everything on your own – it's OK to ask for help. If you are finding it hard being a carer, tell your family members and friends. Make sure the work of caring is shared out fairly. Even if you feel you are coping well, it's still a good idea to share out the work from the start, so that you don't get worn out and can keep a little time to yourself. If you don't have other people to help, talk to your GP or the medical social worker at the hospital to see what help is available.

“ Always make time for yourself at least once a week.
Let someone help when they ask. ”

Look after your health

When someone you care about is unwell, all your attention may be on them. But it's important to remember to look after your own health and wellbeing, so that you can cope with the demands of being a carer.

Self-care means looking after yourself – physically and emotionally. It's about being kind to yourself, knowing that you are important and doing things that make you feel good and positive – without feeling guilty!

Staying healthy

- **Eat well** – make sure to include plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- **Get enough sleep** – take naps if you're tired or ask someone to give you a break at night if you need it. Even if you cannot sleep, try to lie down and rest.
- **Take some exercise** – a 30-minute walk can boost your energy, lift your mood, keep you fit and give you a break.
- **Avoid using alcohol or drugs not prescribed for you as a way to relax.** At the end of a day of caring, you will need to unwind. It is best to avoid alcohol and drugs not prescribed for you as they can lead to poor quality sleep, anxiety and general unwellness the next day. If you are on medication for anxiety or sleeping difficulties, stick to the prescribed dose. Talk to your GP if you feel these aren't working for you. Contact your local cancer support centre for courses on relaxation.
- **Manage stress** – try things like exercising, sharing your feelings or contacting your local cancer support centre for advice on complementary therapies, such as mindfulness or meditation. If you are concerned about burnout or are feeling very stressed, speak to a healthcare professional or a carer's organisation, such as Family Carers Ireland (www.familycarers.ie)

- **Get health problems checked early.** If you are very busy in your caring role, or if you find it hard to leave the house, you may be tempted to ignore your own health problems. However, you need to stay as well as possible to be able to look after someone else. It's important to go to the GP if you are unwell or feel you aren't coping. It is usually easier and quicker to sort out problems if they are tackled early.
- **Protect yourself from injuries,** for example when lifting or moving the person you are caring for.

“ Complementary therapies are not only for the patients, but their carers too. They helped me learn how to relax and be in the moment. ”



Watch out for warning signs

Monitor your physical and mental health. You may be feeling tired, unwell, tearful or angry. You may not be sleeping well or you may have a poor appetite. These can all have a big impact on your health. If you are finding it hard to cope, tell someone and get some support sooner rather than later. Talk to a friend or family member or speak to your GP. You can also get support from a carer's organisation such as Family Carers Ireland (www.familycarers.ie)

Take time out

It's important to take some time away from caring, even if it's only for a short while each day. Try to do this from the start, even if you feel you are coping. For example, if you can't leave your loved one, you could ask a neighbour to come in for half an hour while you go for a walk or a cup of coffee. Or just take some time out to read or watch your favourite TV programme.

It's easy to get isolated from other people if you're always busy with your caring role, so try to meet up with friends or family regularly and carry on with your hobbies or interests if you can. You may not feel like it, but in the longer term it's good to keep a life outside of caring.

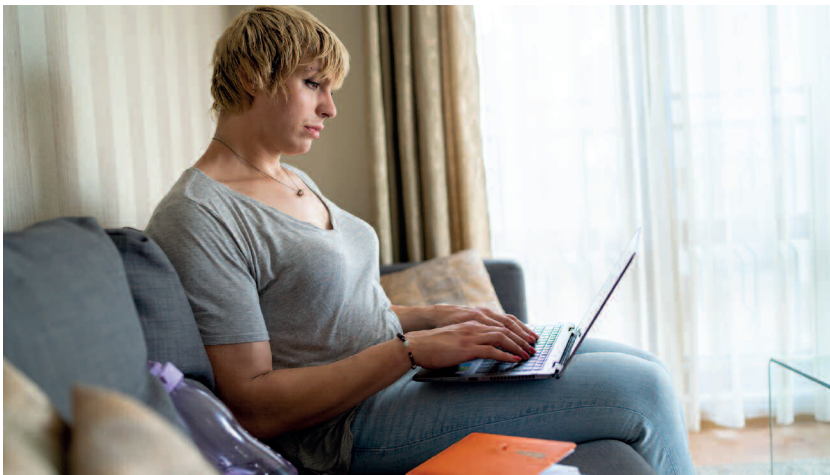
Some people find it useful to keep a journal and write down how they are feeling. If you're not comfortable with this, try to talk to someone. It's important to have support from friends, family members and others that you can turn to when you are tired and stressed. See page 81 for more about getting support. Try to plan outings and meetings that don't involve discussing your loved one. It's OK to want a break.

Have a care plan

If someone else will be caring for your loved one, it can help to have a written care plan. A care plan is a description of the type of care your loved one needs. This could include:

- What your loved one needs at different times of the day.
For example, medications or changes of dressings (plasters/bandages)
- What kind of food and drink they like and anything they should avoid
- What to do/who to call in an emergency

Having a written care plan makes it easier for the person doing the caring. It can also put your mind at rest if you feel nervous about handing care over to someone else.



Be kind to yourself

Being a carer is a wonderful achievement. You are giving so much of yourself to help your loved one at a very difficult time in their life. If you have a tough day, remind yourself of this. Being a carer isn't always easy – you're doing the best you can.

Carers' entitlements

Taking time off work to care

The Carer's Leave Act 2001 allows employees in Ireland to leave their job temporarily to care for someone who needs full-time care and attention. The shortest period of leave allowed is 13 weeks and the longest is 104 weeks. Carer's Leave is unpaid but your employer must keep your job open for you while you are on leave.

Carer's Benefit and Carer's Allowance

You may be eligible for Carer's Benefit if you have enough PRSI contributions. This is a weekly social welfare payment for people who leave work or reduce their hours to provide full-time care to someone. It can be paid for up to 2 years.

If you do not qualify for Carer's Benefit, you may qualify for Carer's Allowance, which is means tested. In other words, the payment will be based on the income that your family receives through work or other social welfare payments.

If you're already on a social welfare payment, you may also be eligible to apply for a reduced rate of Carer's Allowance. If you are in receipt of Carer's Allowance, you will also automatically qualify for a Free Travel Public Services Card and possibly the Household Benefits Package, which includes a payment towards gas or electricity bills.

You can still take Carer's Leave even if you do not qualify for any of the above payments.

Domiciliary Care Allowance

If you are caring for a child with cancer, you may be eligible for Domiciliary Care Allowance.

Domiciliary Care Allowance (DCA) is a monthly payment for a child aged under 16 who needs care and attention for daily living substantially in excess of a child of the same age, for at least 12 months. Children with cancer may meet these criteria. A child must be living at home in order for DCA to be paid.

DCA is not means-tested, so you may qualify for it regardless of your income. As of mid-2026, it is €400 per month.

You may also apply for Carer's Allowance or Carer's Benefit in addition to DCA, if you are caring for a child with cancer.



Carer's Support Grant

The Carer's Support Grant (formerly called the Respite Care Grant) is automatically paid to people getting Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit or Domiciliary Care Allowance. This grant is paid on the first Thursday of June of each year. It is a tax-free payment and as of 2026, it is €2,000 per person being cared for.

If you receive half-rate Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit or Domiciliary Care Allowance, you will still get the full grant.

Additional Needs Payment

This is a payment to help with expenses that you cannot pay from your weekly income or other sources, such as your savings. You may get an Additional Needs Payment if you are getting a social welfare payment, or if you are working but earning a low income.

This payment includes the Exceptional Needs and Urgent Needs Payments. These payments can cover things such as recurring travel costs to hospital appointments and an increase in fuel or electricity costs. However, these payments are for exceptional needs and cannot be used for routine, long-term costs.

There is no set rate for an Additional Needs Payment. The amount you get will depend on your circumstances and what you need help with.



Find out more

The information on this page is correct at the time of going to print (mid-2026), but it's best to check with the medical social worker at the hospital. You can also get more information from MyWelfare (www.mywelfare.ie) or Citizens Information (www.citizensinformation.ie).

There's also more information on money matters and supports available from the Irish Cancer Society on page 109.



Coping with your emotions

Coping with your emotions	79
Getting support	81
Relationships with other people	84
When relationships are difficult	88
If your partner has cancer	90

Coping with your emotions

As a carer, you may experience many different feelings. These include:

Feeling overwhelmed

Becoming a carer can be a sudden and dramatic change to your life. So it's normal to feel overwhelmed at times. Let other carers, family and friends know your feelings and try to share out the role of caring fairly, if you can.



Guilt

Witnessing a loved one become sick is not easy. You may feel that you're not doing enough. Or you may feel guilty because you wish you didn't have to be a carer. You may even feel guilty that they got sick and not you. Many carers feel like this. Try to talk to someone about how you're feeling. Know that you're doing your best. Rather than focusing on these feelings, try to think about positive ways you can help.

Anger

Anger is a very common feeling for both people with cancer and their carers. You can be angry about lots of things, including the many changes cancer has brought to your life. Anger can affect your ability to think clearly. You may also be short-tempered with your loved one if things get on top of you. It can help to talk to someone and work out why you are feeling angry. If you're finding it hard to talk to your family and friends, discuss your feelings of anger with your GP.

Sadness

As well as dealing with new responsibilities, you have to deal with the sad news that someone you love and care for is sick. You might also feel sad about the change in your relationship. This can be very difficult. Try to share your feelings with a friend or family member. Be as honest as you can with your loved one. They will probably be feeling this way too.



Anxious

Carers can feel anxious for different reasons. You may feel overwhelmed at your new responsibilities or take on your loved one's

worries. Talk to them and to other carers about your concerns. Family Carers Ireland runs a national helpline, which can provide confidential support and practical guidance. Call 1800 24 07 24.

Recognise your feelings

Feeling angry, frustrated or sad is normal. It doesn't mean you love the person any less. But it's important to recognise and manage your feelings. Otherwise, these feelings can overwhelm you and make you irritable, resentful, depressed or unwell.

Getting support

Talk to your GP

Talk to your GP if you need support or are finding it hard to cope. As well as providing you with medical care, they can help with organising services to support you, such as occupational therapy, public/community health nursing, home care packages and palliative care.

Talk to the medical social worker at the hospital

Medical social workers help patients and their families with any psychological, emotional, social or practical difficulties during their hospital stay. They can help with issues related to caring for a loved one like stress, financial worries, anger, depression, bereavement, addiction, isolation and loneliness. They can also advise and assist in relation to concerns about adult safeguarding, child protection and welfare, and domestic violence.

Medical social workers can also help you access other helpful services. For example, arranging home supports, supporting applications to other agencies and advocating on behalf of the person with cancer and their family. They can also assist in arranging nursing home care if it is no longer possible to care for your loved one at home.

Find out about cancer support services in your area

There are lots of local cancer support services that provide a range of helpful services to carers, as well as to people with cancer. See page 124 for more about local cancer support services.

Join a support group

Support groups give you the chance to get a break from caring and meet people in a similar situation. You can give each other support and learn from each other's experiences, sharing feelings, information and advice. There are general support groups for carers as well as support groups for specific types of cancer. You might also feel supported by being part of a general social or community group, such as your local Men's Shed, Women's Shed, an active retirement group or a volunteer or charitable group.



Get online support

There are special websites called online communities where people with cancer and their friends and families can write questions, share stories, and give and receive advice and support.

Talk things through

It can be a great weight off your mind to share your feelings and concerns. You could talk to a friend or family member if you feel comfortable doing so. You could also speak to the medical social worker at the hospital or to one of our Cancer Nurses. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre.



Speak to a counsellor

Sometimes it can be hard to talk to the people closest to you if you're feeling very distressed or finding it hard to cope. You may worry about upsetting or worrying your loved one, friends or family.

A trained counsellor who is not involved in your situation can help you to express your feelings, worries and fears, get a different perspective on the situation and make sense of your feelings. Counselling can also give you emotional support, help you to make decisions and learn ways to cope better, while offering you some space and time to focus on yourself.

The Irish Cancer Society funds professional one-to-one counselling for people affected by cancer, including carers. See page 120 for more. Some HSE oncology services provide counselling and psycho-oncology services to carers as well as patients. There are also online counselling services.

It's important to find a counsellor who is professionally qualified and recommended. Call our Cancer Nurses or ask your local cancer support centre or medical social worker for advice and information.

Seek spiritual support

For some people, spiritual and religious beliefs can bring comfort and hope. Practices such as prayer or meditation may help you to focus on what has value and meaning in your life. Your local church or religious centre may also have a social or support group.

If you need more information or help with finding support, call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre.

Relationships with other people

Often there are a number of people who can help to care for a person with cancer – different family members, neighbours and friends. Other people can be a great help, but when someone is ill, sometimes relationships can be difficult.

Sharing the caring - working together as a team

If you do most of the caring, it's important to have support from other people. It's easy to get worn out or overwhelmed if you are trying to do everything on your own.

Trying to organise help from other carers may feel like another job to do. You may feel it's easier to do everything yourself. But the more you take on, the more people may believe that you can handle things alone and that they're not needed.

Including other people from the start and having a plan in place can make things much easier in the long run.

Hints and tips: Making a plan

List jobs: Write a list of jobs that need doing, such as:

- Direct care of the person who has cancer, like personal care and giving medications (see page 13)
- Going to hospital appointments (see page 22)
- Keeping the patient company
- Household jobs like cooking, cleaning and washing clothes
- Running errands, like collecting medications from the pharmacy
- Giving lifts – to medical appointments or to visit friends, attend activities or attend non-medical appointments
- Organising carers and keeping in contact with other family members
- Money matters – paying bills, budgeting, health insurance, legal issues
- Other jobs that help you as the main carer. For example, looking after your children or running errands for you.

Ask for volunteers: Ask people to volunteer for jobs at times that suit them. If a person can't do their job one day, ask them if they can organise a replacement.

Make a monthly plan: Ask people to do the same jobs each week. This is easier than trying to organise everyone week by week.

Have a list of phone numbers: Make a list of the phone numbers of everyone on the caring team and who to call in an emergency. Make sure everyone has a copy.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Sample plan

A plan can include:

- A calendar of things that need to be done regularly like cleaning, organising medicines for the week or giving the main carer a break.
- Occasional events like hospital appointments.
- Blank spaces, where people can volunteer to call in and help out.

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday	Call Irish Cancer Society to arrange a driver for next week's chemo appointment. HELEN	Drop prescription to pharmacy. MARK	SAM visiting 6-7pm
Tuesday	Collect prescription MARK		Making dinner and caring 5-8pm SUE
Wednesday	Cleaning 10-11am PAT	Chemo appointment 2pm KEVIN	Relief for Mary 6-9pm JACK
Thursday	Take car for NCT TARA		
Friday	Oncology consultant appointment. Accompany and message everyone with an update. PETER	TED visiting 2pm	Making dinner and caring 5-8pm SUE
Saturday	Ironing JO		
Sunday	Cleaning 10-11am PAT		Sort out pill box for next week MARK

Organising meetings

Having meetings to keep everyone up to date and to talk about the best way to help your loved one can be very helpful and can help you feel less alone.

Include your loved one in the meeting or talk to them beforehand so that they are involved in the decisions about their care. You might like to talk about:

- The latest report from the doctor: how things are going and what to expect next
- What the person with cancer wants and needs
- Your feelings and concerns
- How much time each family member has to help out or visit
- What the main jobs are and ways each person can help. For example, sharing news with other carers, giving lifts to hospital, cooking and communicating with the healthcare team
- Ways to support the main caregiver practically and emotionally, including making sure they have time off from caring

It's a good idea to write a list of what you all want to talk about, so that you don't forget or miss anything. If you think it will help, you could set some rules beforehand. For example, how often you will have meetings, how long the meeting will last and how to make sure everyone who wants to talk gets time to speak.

If you find it hard to ask for help

If you need more help, especially if you find it hard to ask for help, try starting with small favours. You could ask someone to pick up a few items of shopping for you or to sit with your loved one while you pop out for a few minutes. Getting people involved in a small way and letting them know how much you appreciate them can encourage them to help again.

How to get help

- Make the first move – don't wait for others to offer.
- Be specific about what help you need.
- Say thanks.

Setting limits

Remember that it's OK to say no. It can be very hard to say you are not willing to do something or take on all the responsibility. But if you're clear, people will respect you. You may feel like you're being weak or letting your loved one down. But you need to look after yourself too and it's important to keep some boundaries. If there are other people who can help, it's OK to say that you need them to share the load.

When relationships are difficult

When a person in the family has cancer, it can sometimes put a strain on relationships. For example:

- Other people may comment on or criticise the way you are caring.
- You may feel that other people don't realise or appreciate how much you are doing.
- You may start to resent other people for not helping enough.
- People may feel frustrated or left out if you find it hard to trust them to look after your loved one.

What you can do

Talk about it: If there is conflict or bad feeling between you and other people in your loved one's life, it can be helpful to try and talk about it honestly. Give everyone the chance to speak without interruption.

Be understanding: Try to find out how everyone is feeling. Explain how you feel and how you are affected. Some carers may be

struggling with difficult emotions and find it hard to be around the person who is ill. Some carers may have less time to offer if they have a full-time job or young children. Try to be understanding and support each other.



Look for solutions: Rather than letting resentment and bad feelings build up, see if you can find solutions together. If someone is finding it hard to come to terms with your loved one's illness, they may need help to deal with this before they can join in with caring. If someone is very busy with their own life, they may need support themselves to help them find time for extra jobs. If you find it hard to trust other people with caring responsibilities, writing a detailed care plan means you know they have the information they need. This may help you to feel happier about letting go.

Get support for yourself: If you're finding it hard to deal with other people, try sharing your feelings with someone else, like another carer – online or in a support group – or a friend. See page 81 for ways to get support.

Remember, it's normal for everyone to give care in their own way.

If your partner has cancer

Going through cancer with your partner can bring you closer together and deepen and strengthen your relationship. Unfortunately, a diagnosis of cancer and the demands of caring can also put a strain on your relationship. Recognising some of the challenges can help you to deal with them.



Changing roles

When one person is unwell, it can change the roles in a relationship. For example, if your partner was the one who managed practical matters like bills or did most of the household chores, you may feel overwhelmed at having to manage them. Your partner may experience changes in mood, personality and their ability to make decisions. This can be challenging. It's very normal for both of you to feel sad or frustrated about the change in your relationship.

Talk to your partner about any changes you notice in your relationship and see if there are ways your partner can get involved in their previous role – even by giving you advice and support. Try to get some support for yourself if you're feeling overwhelmed by taking on a new, unfamiliar role.

“ It was difficult to accept that our roles had reversed...but we got through that. ”

Feeling lonely

You might be afraid to share your worries or difficulties with the person who is sick because you don't want to upset them. It can make you feel lonely if you feel you can't talk to the person you used to confide in and who used to support you.

It's important to try and share your feelings as much as you can, to stay close to your partner. Bottling things up can cause frustration, resentment and anger. You may find your partner is having the same feelings as you and will be relieved to be able to talk about them.

You and your sex life

Cancer or its treatment can affect your sex life:

- You or your partner may feel too tired to have sex.
- Your partner may not feel like having sex – dealing with difficult emotions, treatments or side-effects can all affect a person's sex drive.
- You or your partner may find it hard to relax, if you're feeling anxious or stressed.
- There may be tension between you and your partner if there are unresolved issues between you, linked to their cancer.
- Your partner may feel self-conscious if their body has changed as a result of the cancer or treatment.
- Certain types of cancer and cancer treatments can impact sexual function. For example, the ability to get an erection, to orgasm or to have penetrative sex comfortably.
- You may be afraid to be intimate with your partner. You may feel they won't want to have sex if they are unwell or you may be afraid of hurting them.

All of these are linked, so if there is a problem in one area it may have an impact on another. Both you and your partner might withdraw from each other physically and feel shy and awkward. Quite often, sex may stop completely. There's more on sexual relationships and coping with sexual side-effects on our website, www.cancer.ie. You can also get information or advice in confidence from our cancer nurses. Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700, visit your local Daffodil Centre or email the nurses at supportline@irishcancer.ie

Our booklet, *Understanding sex, sexuality and cancer*, also contains advice. Call the Support Line or visit a Daffodil Centre for a free copy. Or download it from www.cancer.ie

Hints and tips: Staying close to your partner

- **Even if your partner doesn't feel like having sex or can't have sex, it's important to talk about it** and acknowledge how you're both feeling. Otherwise, feelings of resentment or rejection can build up.
- **Try to stay physically close.** You can still hug, kiss and touch each other.
- **Try to work through any problems once you've talked about them.** For example, if they're self-conscious about their body, they might prefer to keep the lights off. If penetrative sex is difficult, try other things.
- **Tell the doctor or nurse about difficulties due to the cancer or side-effects of treatments.** They are used to talking about sexual side-effects and can recommend treatments to help.

Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

Caring for someone with advanced cancer

What kind of care will be needed?	95
Planning ahead	98
Palliative care	100
End-of-life care	101

If your loved one is diagnosed with advanced cancer, it means that a cure is no longer possible. Instead treatment is to keep the cancer under control and relieve any symptoms. Care to relieve symptoms is called palliative care (see page 100).

Being diagnosed with advanced cancer doesn't necessarily mean that your loved one will die soon. Some people live for a long time with advanced cancer, but it may take some time for them to adjust to living with advanced cancer.



What kind of care will be needed?

The type of care your loved one needs will depend on how their cancer is affecting them.

Emotional support

Some people with advanced cancer may need very little practical or medical support, especially early on in their illness or if their cancer is not affecting their daily lives too much. But they may need emotional support and a listening ear to try to come to terms with their diagnosis. Some may experience 'anticipatory grief', which is emotional pain experienced before an impending loss. See page 52 for more about how to be a good listener.



You might find our booklet ***Understanding the emotional effects of cancer*** useful if you are giving emotional support to someone with advanced cancer. Call our Support Line to order a copy or download it from www.cancer.ie

“ Every moment with him was precious. I was very close to him and we were able to talk to each other about his illness. ”

Medical support

Advanced cancer can cause side-effects that can be distressing and affect day-to-day life. For example, breathlessness, fatigue or pain. Ways that you can help to support with medical care include:

- Learn about the causes of side-effects and the treatments that are available. This can help you to reassure your loved one and support them in getting the medical care that they need.
- Encourage your loved one to tell their hospital or community healthcare team about any side-effects they have so that they can get help.
- Attend appointments with them. You can help them to provide information about their illness and ask questions, if your loved one is happy for you to do so.
- Make sure they take any medications they are prescribed.
- Ask your hospital or community healthcare team about how to get palliative care support. The palliative care team are experts at managing the symptoms of advanced cancer.



Planning ahead

You might feel anxious or reluctant to talk to your loved one about how they want to be looked after if their cancer progresses. You may be afraid of upsetting them, as well as yourself. But some people find it puts their mind at rest to have plans in place and sort out legal and practical matters, even though they still hope to live for a long time.

Planning ahead is useful for everyone, whether they have an illness or not.

Planning ahead may include:

- **Deciding how they feel about different types of medical treatment**, including if they might want to stop treatment at any stage or carry on for as long as possible.
- **Writing an advance healthcare directive**. This is where a person can write down their wishes about medical care. Doctors can use this if the person is not well enough to say what they want. Information and templates for these agreements are available on the Decision Support Service website at www.decisionsupportservice.ie
- **Picking someone to make medical decisions using an advance healthcare directive if they are not well enough** (this person is called a 'designated healthcare representative'). Or using a decision-making representative or co-decision maker under the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015.
- **Making a will**.
- **Thinking about any preferences about end-of-life care**, such as whether they prefer to stay at home, if possible, or in a hospital or hospice.

Your loved one may not wish to talk to you about these issues. They may prefer to talk to someone else who is not as emotionally involved with their care, such as a solicitor, GP or a medical social worker.

More information on planning ahead

Think Ahead is a pack designed to help you plan. You can fill in your personal, medical, financial and legal information and preferences. Go to www.thinkahead.ie to find out more.

If you want more information about planning ahead, you could speak to the medical social worker at the hospital. Or to speak to one of our Cancer Nurses in confidence about any aspect of planning ahead or about advanced cancer, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre.



“ Use the palliative homecare team and night nurses. They are just unbelievable people and help to the family. ”

Palliative care

Palliative care is care given to patients to improve their symptoms and quality of life. Many people are frightened when they hear the word 'palliative' because they think this means the patient will die soon. Palliative care does include end-of-life care, but it is not just for people at the end of their lives. The palliative care team are experts in helping patients and their loved ones cope with the emotional and physical effects of advanced cancer. Palliative care can be given in hospital or at home.



It's a good idea to ask about palliative care early on. Having the palliative care team involved early can mean symptoms are better controlled and potential problems kept in check. It also means you will have extra support at this difficult time.

At home, palliative care is given by the community palliative care team. This is a team of nurses and doctors who can call to a patient at home and check their symptoms. For example, the team can control your loved one's pain and make changes to their pain medicine if needed. Palliative care teams work closely with GPs and can be a useful support for your loved one and their carers.

The palliative care team in the hospital can also refer your loved one to the community palliative care team.

For more information and some frequently asked questions about palliative care, see our website www.cancer.ie. You can also speak to one of our Cancer Nurses by calling our Support Line 1800 200 700 or by visiting a Daffodil Centre.

“ I questioned the palliative care nurses a lot when Dad was at home and in the hospice. I think Dad didn't really ask the hard questions so I made it my business to get answers where I could. ”

End-of-life care

As a carer, you may need to provide end-of-life care to your loved one. This may be very difficult for you, both emotionally and practically. It's important to connect with services that can give you support. Your GP is your first point of contact if your loved one needs care at home. Your GP can help you to organise the other services that you will need. For example, homecare nurses, the public health nurse and hospice care, if it is needed.

The Irish Cancer Society Night Nursing Service provides a night nurse for end-of-life care at home. The service is free and available for up to 10 nights (see page 122). Our booklet, ***A time to care – Caring for a loved one at home***, also has information and advice to support you. You can read or download it at www.cancer.ie or get a free copy at a Daffodil Centre or by calling our Support Line on 1800 200 700.



Life after caring

How might I feel?	105
How can I adjust to life after caring?	106
Moving on	108

While some people may be relieved to move on from caring responsibilities, some may find it difficult to adjust to life after caring, especially if they have been a full-time carer.



How might I feel?

- **Empty or without purpose:** Caring for someone who is seriously ill can take up most of your time. If you are no longer needed as a carer, you may feel a void or sense of emptiness. You may feel your life has no purpose. It can take some time to get used to this, even if your loved one has recovered.
- **Alone:** You may miss the support of the hospital medical team and other services.
- **Lonely:** Your caring responsibilities might have left you isolated, if you were too busy to have a social life or spend time with friends and family.

- **Anxious about getting back to normal:** For example, you may be worried about returning to work if you took a break to care for your loved one.
- **Worried about problems:** You may have problems that you didn't deal with while you were busy caring. For example, you may have financial problems or your own health issues that you now need to deal with.
- **Sad:** If your loved one passed away, you may find it hard to deal with your loss and feelings of grief.



How can I adjust to life after caring?

Most people who have been carers need to go through a period of adjustment before their lives can return to some kind of normality again. Give yourself time to adjust and deal with your feelings and emotions, such as guilt, loss or grief. And be kind to yourself. Reflect on your time as a carer and the fact that you were there for your loved one when they needed you.

Hints and tips: Going back to work

If you have been caring for some time, you may feel nervous about going back to work or worried that you no longer have the skills you once had.

- **Get professional help with your CV.** Include the skills you learned from your experience as a carer and be upfront about your career break.
- **Take a course to build up your skills.**
- **Get some experience through a work placement or voluntary work,** to build your skills and confidence.
- **Start off with part-time work,** to get used to working again.
- **Use support services like Family Carers Ireland** for advice if you have been caring for a long time and want to get back into the job market. If you are on Carer's Leave from your job and intend to return to work, you must give notice in writing to your employer 4 weeks before your planned date of return.

Support after caring

If you are feeling very sad, stressed or finding it hard to deal with your emotions or your relationships, there are lots of people who can help you. For example, counsellors, services offering financial and legal advice, bereavement support groups and carers' support groups. You can call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to talk in confidence or for information on where to get help.

If you need support with grief, your community palliative care team, hospice team or medical social worker may be able to offer bereavement support services or refer you to other services that may help.

Moving on

Most people find a way to move on with their lives after a period of adjustment. You may find new purpose in your life through:

- Returning to work
- Spending more time with family and friends
- Taking up a new interest or occupation
- Being involved with support groups
- Volunteering

Try not to feel guilty about doing things for yourself. Instead, treat yourself and try to find things you enjoy to fill any extra time you have.



“ We had lots of soul-baring times, lots of sad times and lots of laughs ... it takes away a piece of the carer that never returns, but I would not have had it any other way. ”

Support resources

Money matters	111
Irish Cancer Society services	115
Local cancer support services	124
Useful organisations	125

Money matters

- If you have cancer, you may not be able to work for a time. You may also have extra expenses.
- You may have to pay for some of your cancer treatment.
- You might be entitled to certain social welfare payments.
- There are services to help you if you're finding it hard to manage.

A diagnosis of cancer often means that you will have extra expenses, such as medication, travel, heating and childcare costs.

If you can't work or you are unemployed, this may cause even more stress. It may be harder for you to deal with your illness if you are worried about money.



Our Welfare and Supports Service



Cancer can create additional challenges. Our Welfare and Supports team can help. We can advise on benefits, social welfare entitlements, public services, medical card applications, community support, legal entitlements, housing and mortgages, childcare or talking to your workplace about your diagnosis.

For more information or to be referred to our Welfare and Supports Service visit www.cancer.ie/welfare-and-supports, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Medical expenses

Medical expenses that you might have to pay include:

- Visits to your family doctor (GP)
- Visits to hospital
- Overnight stays in hospital
- Medicines
- Medical aids and equipment (appliances), like wigs

How much you pay towards your medical expenses depends on whether or not you qualify for a medical card and what type of health insurance you have, if any.

If you have a medical card, you will probably have very little to pay for hospital and GP (family doctor) care or your medication. If you are over 70, you can get a free GP visit card.

Medical cards are usually for people on low incomes, but sometimes a card can be given even if your income is above the limit. For example, if you have a large amount of medical expenses. This is known as a discretionary medical card.

An emergency medical card may be issued if you are terminally ill and in palliative care, irrespective of your income.

If you don't have a medical card, you will have to pay some of the cost of your care and medication.

If you have health insurance, the insurance company will pay some of the costs, but the amount will depend on your insurance plan. It's important to contact your insurance company before starting treatment to check you're covered.



Benefits and allowances

There are benefits that can help people who are ill and their family. For example, Illness Benefit, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Leave.

If you want more information on benefits and allowances, contact:

- **The medical social worker** in the hospital you are attending
- **Citizens Information** – Tel: 0818 074 000
- **Department of Social Protection** – Tel: 0818 662 244 or ask to speak to a DSP representative at your local health centre or DSP office.

Always have your PPS number to hand when you are asking about entitlements and benefits. It's also a good idea to keep a copy of completed forms, so take a photo or photocopy them before posting them.

If you have money problems

If you are in debt or are worried about getting into debt, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) can help you. MABS can look at your situation, work out your budget, help you to deal with your debts and manage your payments. The service is free and confidential. Call the MABS Helpline 0818 072 000 for information.

If you are finding it hard to cope financially, contact your medical social worker in the hospital or your local health centre for advice. The Irish Cancer Society can also give some help towards travel costs in certain cases. See page 121 for more details of our Transport Service and the Travel2Care fund.

You can also call our Support Line 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre and the nurse will suggest ways to help you manage.

Money and finances

Go to www.cancer.ie and see our **Welfare and support** page for information on:

- Medical costs and help available
- Benefits and allowances that you or your family may qualify for
- Travel services
- Ways to cope with the cost of cancer

Our website has lots of information on government supports for people who are unwell and their carers. Our Welfare and Supports Service may also be able to help (see page 112).

Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

Irish Cancer Society services

We provide a range of cancer support services for people with cancer, at home and in hospital, including:

- **Support Line**
- **Daffodil Centres**
- **Telephone Interpreting Service**
- **Patient Education**
- **Peer Support**
- **Eating well information sessions**
- **Exercise information and support**
- **Counselling**
- **Transport Service**
- **Welfare and Supports Service** (see page 112)
- **Publications and online information**
- **Night Nursing**

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Our Cancer Nurses offer confidential advice, support and information for anyone affected by cancer. Our Support Line is open Mon to Fri 9am – 5pm. Email us on supportline@irishcancer.ie.

The Support Line also offers video calls. From the comfort of your own home, you can meet a Cancer Nurse virtually. To avail of this service, offered on the Microsoft Teams platform, visit

www.cancer.ie/Support-Line-Video-Calls. One of our nursing team will email you with the time for your video call and instructions on how to access Microsoft Teams on your phone, tablet or computer.



Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Daffodil Centres

Our Daffodil Centres, located in 13 hospitals nationwide, are staffed by Cancer Nurses and trained volunteers who provide face-to-face advice, support and information for anyone affected by cancer. This service is free and confidential. This is a walk-in service; you do not need an appointment.

To see your nearest Daffodil Centre, contact details and opening hours visit www.cancer.ie/daffodil-centres



What information is available?

Our Cancer Nurses provide free and easy-to-understand information on:

- Screening, cancer prevention and early detection
- Cancer types
- Tests and investigations used to diagnose cancer
- Cancer treatments and side-effects
- Local cancer support services
- Life after cancer treatment
- Financial and practical supports
- End-of-life services

Our Cancer Nurses can also give you more information or refer you to any of our supports and services.

Telephone Interpreting Service

We make every effort to ensure that you can speak to our Cancer Nurses in your own language through our Telephone Interpreting Service. To use the service:

- Tell us in English the language you would like.
- You will be put on hold while we connect with an interpreter. You may be on hold for a few minutes. Don't worry, we will come back to you.
- We will connect you to an interpreter.
- The interpreter will help you to speak to us in your own language.



For more information visit www.cancer.ie/our-services, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Patient Education

We offer free group sessions (online and in person) and video resources that provide information to guide you through and beyond cancer treatment.

Chemotherapy Education is for cancer patients who are due to have chemotherapy. The aim of the session is to guide the patient through the treatment from beginning to end: what chemotherapy is, how it is given, managing side-effects and available supports.



Our after-treatment education workshop is called **Life and Cancer – Enhancing Survivorship (LACES)**. It was developed in partnership with the National Cancer Control Programme. LACES aims to improve the quality of patients' lives after active treatment has ended.

Patient education sessions are led by our Cancer Nurses. Sessions take place online or in person in our 13 Daffodil Centres nationwide.

We also have pre-treatment video resources that you can watch in your own time. For more information visit www.cancer.ie/our-services, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700, contact a Daffodil Centre or email patienteducation@irishcancer.ie

Peer Support

Peer Support is a free and confidential telephone service connecting people with similar cancer experiences. If you have a cancer diagnosis, you can be connected with a Peer Support volunteer who has had a similar cancer experience. Peer Support volunteers are fully trained to provide emotional and practical cancer support in a safe, responsible and kind way.

More information on Peer Support is available at www.cancer.ie/our-services. To be connected to a Peer Support volunteer, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.



Eating well information sessions

Knowing the right foods to eat after a cancer diagnosis can be overwhelming. We provide group online information sessions with an Oncology Dietitian on the important role nutrition has for people with cancer. Using evidence-based specialist advice, we can support you to eat well during cancer treatments and beyond.

For more information visit www.cancer.ie/our-services, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Exercise information and support

Exercise before, during and after treatment can improve quality of life. We provide information and support on how you can make exercise part of your everyday life. We also offer free exercise classes to help people with cancer to improve fatigue, improve quality of life, reduce anxiety and build strength and fitness in a fun and supportive environment.

For more information visit www.cancer.ie/our-services, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.



Counselling

We fund professional one-to-one counselling for anyone affected by cancer – the person diagnosed with cancer, family members and close friends. Counselling sessions are available remotely (over the telephone/online) or in person in certain cancer support centres around the country.

For more information visit www.cancer.ie/our-services call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Transport Service

We provide transport and limited financial grants for patients in need who are in cancer treatment.

Transport is available to patients having chemotherapy treatments in our partner hospitals who are having difficulty getting to and from their local appointments. We have recently opened a pilot service for patients having radiotherapy treatment at University Hospital Cork and Bons Secours Hospital, Cork.



Travel2Care is a fund for patients who are having difficulty getting to and from their appointments for diagnostic tests or cancer treatment. Patients can apply for this fund if they travel over 50 kilometres one way to a national designated cancer centre or satellite centre. Travel2Care is made available by the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP).

To access this support, please contact your hospital healthcare professional. For more information visit www.cancer.ie/our-services, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Publications and online information

We provide information on a range of topics, including early detection of cancer, cancer types, treatments, side-effects and coping with cancer. Visit our website www.cancer.ie to see our full range of information and download copies. You can also call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre for free copies of any of our publications.

Night Nursing

We provide end-of-life care for cancer patients in their own homes. We offer up to 10 nights of care free of charge for each patient. Our service supports patients to remain at home for the last days of their lives, surrounded by their families and loved ones. This is a unique service in Ireland, providing night-time palliative nursing care to cancer patients, mostly between 11pm and 7am.

To access this service please contact the healthcare professional looking after your loved one. For more information visit www.cancer.ie/our-services

“ We were really lost when we brought Mammy home from the hospital and the night nurse’s support was invaluable. She provided such practical and emotional support. ”

“ Our night nurse was so caring and yet totally professional. We are so grateful to her for being there for Dad and for us. ”

To find out more about the Irish Cancer Society’s services and programmes:

Visit us at www.cancer.ie

Speak with one of our Cancer Nurses:

- Call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700
- Visit one of our 13 Daffodil Centres in hospitals nationwide

Email the nurses at supportline@irishcancer.ie

Follow us on:

- Facebook @IrishCancerSociety
- X @IrishCancerSoc
- Instagram @irishcancersociety
- LinkedIn @irish-cancer-society



Local cancer support centres

Local cancer support centres have a range of services for cancer patients, their partners, families and carers, during and after treatment, many of which are free. For example:

- **Professional counselling** (the Irish Cancer Society funds one-to-one counselling through many local support centres)
- **Support groups**, often led by professionals like social workers, counsellors, psychologists or cancer nurses
- **Special exercise programmes**
- **Stress management and relaxation techniques**, such as mindfulness and meditation
- **Complementary therapies** like massage, reflexology and acupuncture
- **Specialist services** such as prosthesis or wig fitting and lymphoedema services, such as education, exercise, self-management and manual lymph drainage
- **Mind and body sessions**, for example, yoga and tai chi
- **Expressive therapies** such as creative writing and art
- **Free Irish Cancer Society publications** and other high-quality, trustworthy information on a range of topics

Cancer support centres usually have a drop-in service where you can call in for a cup of tea and find out what's available.

Visit www.hse.ie to find a cancer support centre in your area or visit www.cancer.ie and search 'local cancer support centres'.

Our Cancer Nurses can also help you to find supports and services. Call our Support Line or visit a Daffodil Centre to talk to a nurse.

Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

Useful organisations

Carers support and information

Family Carers Ireland

Careline 1800 24 07 24

Email: careline@familycarers.ie

Website: www.familycarers.ie

Young Carers' Programme (run by Family Carers Ireland)

Website: www.youngcarers.ie

Care Alliance Ireland

Tel: 01 874 7776

Email: info@carealliance.ie

Website: www.carealliance.ie

Healthcare, services and treatment

HSE Live

Tel: 1800 700 700

Website: www.hse.ie

Benefits and entitlements

Citizens Information

Tel: 0818 07 4000

Website:

www.citizensinformation.ie

MyWelfare (Department of Social Protection)

Website: www.mywelfare.ie

Financial support

Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)

Helpline: 0818 07 2000

Email: helpline@mabs.ie

Website: www.mabs.ie

Palliative and end-of-life care

The Palliative Hub (Adult)

Tel: 01 491 2948

Email: info@aaihpc.org

Website:

www.adultpalliativehub.com

The Palliative Hub (Children and Young People)

Tel: 01 491 2948

Email: info@aaihpc.org

Website:

www.childrenspalliativehub.com

Irish Hospice Foundation

Information and Support Line:

1800 60 70 66

Bereavement Support Line:

1800 80 70 77

Website:

www.hospicefoundation.ie

Join the Irish Cancer Society team

If you want to make a difference to people affected by cancer, join our team! Visit www.cancer.ie if you want to get involved.

Support people affected by cancer

Reaching out directly to people with cancer is one of the most rewarding ways to help:

- Help people needing lifts to hospital by becoming a volunteer driver
- Give one-on-one support to someone newly diagnosed with cancer as part of our Peer Support programme
- Give information and support to people concerned about or affected by cancer at one of our hospital-based Daffodil Centres

Share your experiences

Use your voice to bring reassurance to cancer patients and their families, help people to connect with our services or inspire them to get involved as a volunteer:

- Share your cancer story
- Tell people about our services
- Describe what it's like to organise or take part in a fundraising event

Raise money

All our services are funded by the public's generosity:

- Donate directly
- Take part in one of our fundraising events or challenges
- Organise your own event

Did you like this booklet?

We would love to hear your comments or suggestions.
Please email reviewers@irishcancer.ie



Our cancer nurses are here for you:

- Support Line Freephone **1800 200 700**
- Email **supportline@irishcancer.ie**
- Contact your nearest Daffodil Centre