



end of treatment...



what happens next?

## **Finishing treatment for cancer –** this booklet is aimed at 10-16 year olds although it may be of interest to other young people.

This leaflet was made possible by a donation from  
Teenage Cancer Trust Registered Charity No: 1062559

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Designed and Published July 2007 by the CCLG  
Reprinted May 2009

We are grateful to all those who contributed to this booklet.

All quotations have been supplied by 10-16 year olds.

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HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE  
FIGHT CANCER



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# well done!

This is probably the moment you have waited for since you became ill, it can also be a strange time and you may be surprised you are not feeling quite as happy as you thought you would. Sometimes you may feel up but other times down.

We hope this booklet will answer some of the questions you have and will help you to relax and enjoy your great achievement of completing treatment.

We have included some practical points about what happens at the end of treatment as well as mentioning how you might be feeling at this time.

*"People assume that having cancer is just like having the flu and that I should just fit back into my previous life with ease."*



# feelings and emotions

Whatever you thought it would be like, most young people tell us that the first few weeks and months off treatment is a time when they're surprised at the strange mixture of happy and worried feelings that they have. This section explains that all these feelings are normal and why you might have them. We've also included some tips on coping with these feelings.

## excited and worried all at once!

A lot of young people find that they have pretty mixed feelings about being at the end of treatment.

To start with, there are so many great things about finishing treatment!:

- No more feeling sick
- No more tablets
- Going back to school
- Having hair again
- Looking normal
- Stopping steroids
- Going out with mates more
- Getting rid of your line
- Less boring times at hospital



Even though all these things will make your life loads easier, a lot of young people also find that they're worried and have times when they feel pretty fed up.

One problem is that you don't get any guarantees that all that treatment has worked. Even when you do something as simple as buy a new mobile, at least they guarantee it'll work for a year. With cancer treatment, after all you've gone through, you don't even get that! So of course, it's normal to worry. But, if you think about it, not even pop stars, Olympic athletes or the Royal family, gets a guarantee about being healthy! Anyone, your school/college mates, your cousins, the man you sat next to on the bus this morning, could get cancer or another serious illness tomorrow. So in a way, everyone has that slight worry. Further on in this booklet there are some tips on what might help when you're having worried days.

## what about celebrating?

Some young people want to mark the end of treatment with something special. Here are some of the things you could do:

- have a special meal with your family
- plan a party or celebration evening with your mates
- do something that you couldn't do before, like go swimming
- plan a holiday.

Some young people don't feel like celebrating because they are worried about the future or can't do everything they used to. Even if there are lots of challenges ahead, by getting through all that tough treatment you've done something pretty amazing, so give yourself a pat on the back and some sort of treat – even if it's only a huge pizza or an extra long lie in!

*“we had a celebration party/fundraiser, having a goal to aim for made the end of treatment more exciting rather than daunting”*

## how to cope with worry

Some people don't worry when they get to the end of treatment, others do.

Some young people find that thoughts about what has happened, and about their health and future, can keep them awake at night and stop them enjoying life so much.

If this happens to you, there's a lot you can do:

- 1** Find someone to talk to. Worries that just go round and round in your head tend to get bigger. If you can tell a friend or teacher or someone in your family, you might find you feel better even if they can't completely take the worry away.
- 2** Some people find they need to talk to a counsellor, especially if their worry won't go away or if it's stopping them from enjoying themselves. In some parts of the country there are also groups where young people who have had cancer treatment can get together. Another way to find out how other people in your position feel is through websites. We've listed some good ones at the back of this booklet.
- 3** Write a list of the things that worry you, then next to it write what you can do about each of these things. If there's nothing you can do, there's no point in worrying – how about deciding not to? Lists can be good if you can't find a good person to talk to or if you're worrying in the middle of the night. Sometimes just putting things down on paper helps you to feel more on top of problems and to find ways to deal with them.
- 4** Use up the energy from your worrying in another way. Best not to take it out on the cat or your little brother, but doing something energetic like kicking a football around or even hitting your pillow may help!

### **Above all remember the facts:**

- **Most cancers in children and young people don't come back, ever.**
- **The chances of the cancer coming back get smaller and smaller the longer you have been off treatment.**
- **For many cancers, there's still a chance of cure even if they do come back.**



## how to cope with your family

Most young people notice that lots of other things change in their families while they are having their treatment. To start with of course, lots of people worry about you. You may have had family and friends giving you presents and phoning to ask about how you were doing. The people in your family probably gave you extra attention too. Sometimes this can be too much and get on your nerves, but at other times it can be helpful to know how much people care when you're not feeling too good.

At the end of treatment some young people find that they miss this special treatment and find they don't feel as important as they did when they were ill. It can sometimes be hard getting used to being treated the same as everyone else. There are other young people though who really wish their family would treat them as normal. Your mum or dad will probably have needed to keep an extra close eye on you while you were having your treatment, making sure you had your medicines and checking for side effects. Lots of mums and dads find it really hard to stop doing this when treatment is over. Like you, they may worry about the chance of the cancer coming back. You know that you feel OK, whereas they don't. It can really get on your nerves to be asked if you are alright all the time, but it's good to remember why your family might be worried. If this is a problem in your family you could agree to tell them if you feel at all ill, if they will agree not to ask you all the time!



## brothers and sisters

When you were ill, things probably changed a lot for your brothers and sisters too. A lot of brothers and sisters feel really left out, especially if they didn't get presents or treats like you did. They may have found it hard to be without your mum or dad if you had a lot of time at the hospital with them. Now that you're off treatment, they may worry about your health too or may feel left out if you are still getting extra attention.

## what about boyfriends and girlfriends?

Many young people say that they feel "different" from their friends when they have been through cancer treatment. It can be hard to feel confident when you have lost your hair and are not your usual weight. Making new friends when you look different or can't do everything that other people can do, can feel like a big challenge. It's the same when it comes to girlfriends and boyfriends. It's good to remember that almost everyone you meet will also feel that there are parts of themselves or their background that they would like to change. A lot of the people you meet will feel that they couldn't have coped with your illness and the treatment you've had. It's up to you who you tell about your illness, but remember that often the people, who you are open with, will feel much more able to tell you about their own worries. Having had cancer doesn't stop you having normal relationships and getting married just like your friends.



## coping with coming back to the hospital

Some people enjoy seeing old friends back at the hospital, but quite a lot of young people dread going back once they've finished treatment. It's natural to feel frightened that the doctors will find a problem with your health, but remember that at most follow up appointments there are no problems found at all.

The hospital can be a reminder of all the tough times you had during treatment. It can be hard too seeing other children and young people going through their treatment. It's especially hard if you find out that someone you know from the hospital has been ill again. Lots of young people say that they get a mixture of feelings if this happens. It's natural to feel relieved that you're healthy when you hear bad news – that's something everyone feels, but it's common too to feel guilty that you're well when others aren't. Feeling guilty can be hard work. It's usually better to find a way to do something practical instead. You could send a card if you know the person who is ill again, or how about getting involved in some fundraising or another activity?

Remember, for every person you see at the hospital whose cancer has come back there will be another three at home doing well – and of course they hardly ever come to the hospital, so it's no wonder that you don't see them. It's hard not to compare yourself with other patients, but remember that no two cancers are the same and no two people are the same.

“I felt upset and moody.  
I don't like talking about what  
has happened to me.”



## what if your body can't fully repair itself?

Sometimes cancer, or cancer treatment, causes damage that the body cannot repair. If this has happened to you, your doctors will have talked to you about this.

If you had treatment for a tumour in your brain or spinal cord you may not be able to do all the things that you could before you were ill. Some young people find that the way they look is permanently changed by the cancer or treatment. These things are extra hard and may make you feel that finishing treatment won't make your life much easier. It takes a lot to get your head round changes that might last for the rest of your life and that make you different from your friends. Most young people have times when they feel sad and often very angry that this has happened, but most young people also find that in time they can adjust and really enjoy life again.

Even if a full recovery isn't possible you will get stronger in the weeks and months after finishing treatment. Some people find that because there are some things they can't do, they can do some other things extra well. For example, people who use wheelchairs often have very strong arms which help them to manage despite problems with their legs. We've listed lots of organisations in the back of this booklet that can give you and your family help so that you can still get the most out of life.



**"your priorities change and give you a totally different perspective on life. This can make it hard just to go back to 'normal' "**

# practical issues

## what happens now?

FOLLOW UP PLAN:

you can fill this in

	How often	What tests	Other things
1st year			
2nd year			
3rd year			
4th year			
5th year			

When you first finish treatment you will need to come frequently to the clinic.

This is usually every 4-6 weeks in the first year, sometimes more often especially if you still have a central line. As time goes by you don't have to come so often, usually every three months in the second year, until by the time 5 years have passed you are only seen once a year. If you had some of your treatment at a Shared Care hospital you may still have some visits there.

"It helped knowing how often I was to come back and to have someone who knew me and I knew them."

## when will my hair grow back?

It will start to grow back as soon as you stop having treatment. It can take a while to thicken up. Sometimes when it grows back it may be slightly different in colour, thickness and how curly it is.

## when can I stop worrying about infection?

When your treatment finishes your blood count should be back to normal within about a month. If you have had a bone marrow transplant it may take longer for your body to be able to fight infections normally again. For the first 6 months after treatment stops you will need to let the hospital know if you come into contact with chicken pox or measles, if that's what you did while you were on treatment.

## when can I have my line out?

As soon as possible after your treatment is finished and any scans or tests are completed. You will need a general anaesthetic to have it removed, so you have to spend the day in hospital. You may have to wait for a space on an operating list.

## what happens if I need a blood test after my line is out?

You will not need many blood tests now but some will be important. No one likes blood tests but unfortunately they may still be necessary so if you don't have a line you will either have a thumb prick or a needle.

## what happens when I come back to hospital?

At first the visits are to check there are no signs of the cancer/leukaemia coming back. As time passes, the visits are to make sure there are no longer-term problems caused by your treatment. Usually you will be weighed and measured at each visit. This is to check you are growing, as expected. You may need an X-ray, a blood test or occasionally a heart scan, depending on what treatment you had.

You will be seen by the same doctors and nurses you saw during treatment but the clinics may be held at a different time or day.

## will I still have to take any medicines?

You may have to continue to take some antibiotics (e.g. Septrin) for a few weeks after treatment has stopped, or for longer after a transplant.

After this most people don't take anything, but sometimes there are some medicines to take. Some hormones (messenger chemicals in your blood) can be affected by treatment, especially after radiotherapy to the head, so you might have to take tablets or injections to replace them e.g. thyroxine – thyroid hormone.

## when will my weight be back to normal?

You may have lost or gained weight depending on your treatment. Hopefully when your taste and appetite return you will be able to get back to healthy eating and your weight will get back to normal. This may take some time, but the important thing is to eat healthily and, if you can, take some exercise.

## will I need more immunisations?

Yes, you usually need to repeat the immunisations you had as a baby.

## what do i do if i feel unwell?

If you have a temperature and still have a central line, or are neutropaenic, you will have to come to the hospital. Once your line is out and your blood is back to normal, it is usually best to see your GP first, then they can decide if you need to go back to the hospital. If you had a bone marrow transplant you need to ask the hospital what you should do if you feel unwell.

## who can i contact if i am worried about something?

If you want to talk to someone between visits to the follow up clinic, you can talk to the Macmillan/CLIC Sargent nurse or other nurse specialist. If they can't help they will arrange for someone else to contact you. There are also some websites that you might find helpful at the end of this booklet.

## what should i look out for/worry about?

Young people who have had cancer treatment still get coughs and colds and aches and pains. It is hard not to worry about getting ill again but try to remember that if you feel unwell that it is far more likely to be an everyday illness than anything serious. There are very few things you can look out for. You will be checked over at clinic visits and should mention anything you have been anxious about to the doctor or nurses. As time passes and life gets back to normal, it should get easier not to worry so much.

## is there anything i can't do?

For most people, there's no reason you shouldn't do all the activities you did before you were ill. If your treatment has left you with any problems, such as mobility or concentration, you may not be able to do everything. Your friends and school/college will be able to help you join in as many things as possible and maybe try some new activities.



## **sometimes I still feel tired...**

When you finish treatment you may still feel tired because you are not as strong as you were before. It will take time to return to your normal life. You may have lost weight and are not used to joining in everything you did before. It takes time to build up your stamina, but you can help by eating a good balanced diet and introducing activities gradually. Everybody is different but hopefully you will soon be able to attend school/college full time and join in sport and other activities both in and out of school/college.

## **How long will I keep coming back to clinic?**

This will depend on the treatment you had, but most people are seen for many years after finishing treatment. Eventually it may only be every 1-2 years. This is to give you the chance to talk about any worries you have and to check for any long term problems.

## **I want to forget all about my illness, why do I have to keep coming back?**

It is very understandable to feel like this and if you can be discharged from the clinic, you will be. For most people this isn't possible, because some treatments that cure cancer may occasionally cause other health problems, which don't become noticeable until some years later. For example, some treatments can affect your thyroid gland and you may need to take tablets of thyroxine.

## **How can I find other people my age who've had cancer that I can talk to?**

There are several organisations, most with websites, for young people who have had cancer. They are listed at the end of this booklet. There may also be a group who meet at your treatment centre that you might like to join. If no group exists you may like to set one up.

# school/college and other issues

## returning to school/college

Returning to school/college can be both an exciting and anxious time for you. You may have already managed to attend school/college while you were on treatment or maybe you had some home teaching.

Hopefully, before you return to school/college there will be an opportunity for you, your parents and a member of the hospital team to have a meeting with your teachers. This meeting will give you the chance to talk about any worries you may have and it will also be an opportunity to tell the school/college about your treatment and how it affected you.

## how can I get ready for going back to school/college?

You may feel worried that you have missed a lot of school/college and feel there are gaps in what you have managed to learn while you were on treatment.

You may be wondering how you will fill the gaps and start working on all the same subjects at the same level as your friends and classmates.

### remember:

- **If you have had home teaching you will have covered a lot of the same work as your classmates but perhaps not all of the subjects.**
- **When you work with a home tutor one-to-one you achieve much more in less time than it would take in a classroom, so you may be ahead in some subjects.**
- **Continuing with extra tutoring at home or at school/college will help you get back on track.**
- **Talking to your parents and teachers about things you are having trouble with will help them come up with a plan that will give you what you need in school/college.**
- **School/colleges are used to helping pupils who have been ill and should be able to set up any extra help you need.**

## physical appearance/activities

There may be some visible signs of your cancer and treatment, while other effects of the cancer are not visible.

Thinking about the things on this list may help you with going back to school/college:

- would you like a teacher or someone from the hospital to talk to your class/year about your illness, so people know why you look/feel different?
- do you need to wear a hat or scarf to school/college?
- are there any activities you cannot take part in?
- if walking is difficult for you, will the teachers allow more time between classes?
- if it's hard to get around or you are in a wheelchair, will the teachers move the classes around so that you can get to them?
- do you need to sit in a certain place in the classroom in order to make it easier to hear or see what's happening?
- Could you go back to school/college part time if you get tired easily and find a full school/college day too much?

## what about friends?

- Telling friends about your cancer is the best way to overcome any uneasiness they may have about what has happened to you.
- Be sure to tell your friends that cancer is not 'catching' so they know that no one can 'catch' the cancer from you!
- Be as open and honest with teachers and friends as you can, they are there to help you as much as you will let them.
- It may be helpful to find one teacher who you can talk to who will make sure your return to school/college is as smooth as possible.
- Build on the friendships you already have, and look for people who may be new friends.
- Try joining a group or club or a sports team.

**remember** there are people who can help you with these things if you want. You will not have to talk to friends on your own. Teachers themselves are there to help you. Your parents and hospital staff will also support you in talking about any of these things.

# healthy living

**Now that your treatment is finished you need to think about getting your energy back and staying as fit and healthy as possible.**

Cancer and cancer treatment affect everyone in different ways. You may have had lots of trouble with your appetite, making you lose weight or you may have had tablets that made you ravenously hungry and at times gain a lot of weight.

If you have had trouble gaining weight during treatment, the chances are that now you have finished treatment you will slowly begin to put on weight.

It is important that you do not become overweight in the future so returning to a healthy diet and physical activity is important.

The advantages of good diet and physical activity are:

- they help to heal your tissues and organs that have been damaged by the cancer and the treatment
  - they build up your strength and stamina
  - they reduce the risk of developing other health problems as you grow older
  - they help you generally to feel fit and energetic.



The every day food that you eat should contain a balance of the following five foods:

- bread, cereal and potatoes
- fruit and vegetables
- milk and dairy
- meat, fish and alternatives e.g. nuts and pulses
- foods containing fat and foods and drinks containing sugar (Foods in this group are not essential to a healthy diet).

Being healthy means eating a low fat, high fibre diet (e.g. lots of fruit and vegetables, brown bread and cereals) not smoking, exercising regularly and avoid drinking too much alcohol.

### Examples of healthy eating include:

- **Choosing jacket potatoes instead of chips**
- **For breakfast cereal have shreddies not frosties**
- **Choose fruit for pudding rather than cake**



You should try and fit in some physical activity every day.

Most people love to sunbathe, but it is very important to use a high factor sunscreen to avoid developing skin cancer.

## remember

**Enjoy your food:**

- eat a variety of different foods
- eat the right amount to be a healthy weight
- eat plenty of fruit and vegetables
- don't eat too much food that contains a lot of fat
- don't have sugary foods and drinks too often.



“I found that meeting other young people and doing normal things, like bowling etc, really helped me come to terms and cope, with coming off treatment”

## What's Transition?

Transition is a word we use for the time you move through the growing up years from being a child dependent on mum and dad to becoming an independent adult.

This transition happens when you move from being at school/college to going to work or college, from living at home to perhaps living away from home. This also happens with your health. You will gradually take charge of your health, so you will need to know all about your cancer and treatment and the importance of staying healthy.

This section of the booklet talks a little bit about the long term plan of how you will be looked after in the years after your treatment is over. You will need to continue coming to the hospital for many years after your treatment has finished.

As a teenager, when your cancer treatment is several years behind you, you may attend a follow up clinic purely for teenagers, if your hospital has one.

As you grow up, the doctors will talk more to you and less to your parents about the cancer and treatment. It will be important for you to understand why you need to continue to see the doctors and nurses at the hospital even though it may be many years since you had your treatment. This will be explained to you on your visits to clinic. During these visits you will also talk about keeping fit and healthy, as this will be very important for the rest of your life (you can read about healthy living on page 20).

Eventually, when you feel confident enough, you will be able to see the doctors on your own. Hopefully, you will feel able to talk to them about the things that matter to you about your cancer and treatment.

# useful websites

## Teenage Cancer Trust

Deals with all issues relating to teenagers and young adults with cancer.

**Tel:** 020 7612 0370

**Website:** [www.teenagecancertrust.org](http://www.teenagecancertrust.org)

## click4tic

Provides information, support and the chance to share experiences of cancer with other teenagers and young adults.

**Tel:** 0808 800 1234

**Website:** [www.click4tic.org.uk](http://www.click4tic.org.uk)

## after cure

Explores issues and feelings that arise for young people aged 16 + who have been successfully treated for cancer.

**Website:** [www.aftercure.org](http://www.aftercure.org)

## 2bme

An American site launched by the Look Good ... Feel Better for Teens program. Provides information and advice on dealing with the appearance related changes that cancer treatment brings and other issues relevant to teenagers with cancer.

**Website:** [www.2bme.org](http://www.2bme.org)

## Planet Cancer

An American site set up by young adults with cancer offering information and support for other young people with cancer.

**Website:** [www.planetcancer.org](http://www.planetcancer.org)

## DIPEX

DIPEX shows you a wide variety of personal experiences of health and illness. You can watch, listen to or read their interviews, find reliable information on treatment choices and where to find support.

**Website:** [www.dipex.org](http://www.dipex.org)











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**CCLG leaflets are available to  
download from [www.childcancer.org.uk](http://www.childcancer.org.uk)**