

Eating well with blood cancer

Your guide to eating safely and
getting the nutrition you need

**Blood
cancer
UK**

BDA The Association
of UK Dietitians
Oncology
Specialist Group

This booklet has been created with the British Dietetic Association's Haematology Sub-Group and is endorsed by the BDA Oncology Specialist Group.

Need to talk?

Contact the Blood Cancer UK Support Service with questions or worries about your diagnosis, family, work, mental health, the future.



Call free on **0808 2080 888**

Email **support@bloodcancer.org.uk**

Visit **bloodcancer.org.uk**

Talk to others **bloodcancer.org.uk/our-forum**

We're the UK's specialist blood cancer charity, supporting anyone affected by any blood cancer. Family and friends can contact us for support too.

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Why does eating well matter?



Eating well is an important part of looking after your body and mind when you have blood cancer.

Nutritious food and drink will give you energy to help you through treatment, support your recovery and live your daily life.

Alongside keeping active and looking after your emotional wellbeing, eating well can help you:

- prepare for treatment
- cope with treatment side effects
- improve your ability to fight off infection
- recover from treatment and heal wounds faster
- feel stronger and have more energy
- lower the risk of developing other illnesses.

Some people say that eating well is something positive they can do for their health, when many other things feel out of their control.

Be kind to yourself

When we talk about eating well, we don't mean following a special diet or lots of rules and restrictions. You're already going through a lot, so don't put pressure on yourself to eat in a "perfect" way.

Eating well is about being kind to yourself, by eating food that gives you the nutrients and energy you need. And treats are important too!



How did blood cancer change your attitude to eating?

"My relationship with food since diagnosis has been a rollercoaster, but now my mantra is 'I do what I can, as much as I can.'

"Balance is the key. I still order the occasional take away when life gets in the way. The main thing is doing what I can to give myself the best chance of a long and healthy life."

Anna, diagnosed with blood cancer in 2015.

More advice on living well

We have information about eating well, keeping active and looking after your mental health:

bloodcancer.org.uk/live-well

If you don't use the internet, call free on

0808 2080 888.

We can post what you need.

What should I be eating?



For most people, a balanced approach to food is the best thing for overall health.

This means eating a range of foods from all the food groups your body needs. This chapter gives a brief guide to healthy eating, including tips to help you eat well on a budget.

Everyone is different, so ask your healthcare team if you have any questions or worries about what you should be eating. The advice they give will depend on your individual situation. We have some suggested questions on page 13.

Sometimes blood cancer and treatment can make it harder to eat, making you lose weight. If this is happening to you, your main focus might be on getting as much energy as you can from the food you eat. You can read more about energy and building up weight in this chapter.

I've become more aware of what I eat and drink and how it makes me feel. For example, I've noticed my fatigue is worse if I don't drink enough water, so I make sure I stay hydrated.

Fiona, living with blood cancer since 2022.



A quick guide to healthy eating

Here's a quick guide to the types of food everyone should aim to include in their diet:

- **You need carbohydrates for energy** – Wholewheat pasta, brown rice, wholegrain bread and potatoes with skin on are all healthy options. Carbohydrates should make up around a third of a meal.
- **Protein helps your body grow and repair** – Try beans, peas, lentils, fish, meat, dairy, eggs and vegetarian and vegan alternatives such as Quorn or tofu. Aim to have some protein with every meal.
- **Eat a wide range of fruit and vegetables** – They're packed with vitamins, minerals and are a good source of fibre.
- **Dairy products are great for bone health** – Milk, cheese and yoghurt all count. Dairy-free alternatives are also good – check they have added calcium.
- **Fibre is important for gut health** – Choose wholegrain, eat the skin on fruits and vegetables and have unsalted nuts, seeds, beans and pulses as part of your daily diet.
- **We all need a little fat in our diet** – Unsaturated fats like vegetable oils, nuts and oily fish are best for health.

It's also important to stay hydrated. Aim for six to eight cups or glasses of fluid a day. Water, milk and sugar-free drinks, (including tea and coffee) all count.

Getting the energy you need

It's important to try to eat the right amount of food each day. Your body needs energy from the calories in your food to keep you alive and stay strong.

You need energy for physical activity, but also to power your body. Organs like your lungs, heart, liver and brain use hundreds of calories every day. That energy needs to come from the food you eat. If your energy intake becomes too low you'll start to lose weight. This might make you feel tired and weak.

Everyone is different and may need different amounts of calories. As a guide, an average man needs around 2,500 calories and an average woman needs 2,000 calories a day, to maintain a healthy body weight.

Do I need supplements?

Your healthcare team might recommend supplements if you're not able to get all the nutrients you need from food.

The NHS says everyone should consider taking a daily vitamin D supplement during autumn and winter. And some people should take it all year. Your hospital team or GP can let you know what's best for you.

Some supplements could be harmful in high doses, or affect your treatment. So always check with your dietitian, doctor or pharmacist before taking anything new.

Building up your weight

Some people with blood cancer find they lose weight without intending to. It can happen because of the blood cancer itself, or because the side effects of treatment make it difficult to eat.

It's important to tell your hospital doctor, GP or clinical nurse specialist if you're losing weight. They can refer you to a dietitian for advice. They might also prescribe high calorie drinks or supplements to give you extra nutrition.

These are just a few tips for getting extra calories if you're struggling to eat:

- Add extra calories and protein to any food you eat by adding extra olive oil, nuts, cream, butter, milk, honey or cheese.
- Eat puddings and desserts. Foods with fat and sugar are a good source of calories.
- Sometimes drinks might be easier to manage than solid food. Try smoothies, lassis and milkshakes. You can make your own with frozen or fresh fruit, full fat milk, full fat yoghurt or ice cream.

Macmillan Cancer Support has a booklet called "The building-up diet", with advice on how to build up your weight during and after cancer treatment. Call Macmillan on **0808 808 00 00** or visit **macmillan.org.uk** to order a copy.

Check the facts about food

You might see and hear confusing and conflicting advice about food and cancer – in the news, on social media and even from friends and family. Sometimes it can be hard to know what advice to trust.

We've put together a list of common questions, to help you check the facts about food and blood cancer:

bloodcancer.org.uk/food-questions

You can also call us to talk things through,
on **0808 2080 888**.

Shopping and cooking on a budget

It may feel like a big challenge to eat well when money is tight. But healthy food doesn't need to cost a lot.

- **Use frozen or tinned fruit and veg** – they're just as nutritious as fresh and are often much cheaper. And they're usually ready-chopped, saving you time and energy when you're feeling fatigued.
- **When buying fresh, choose food that's in season** – like sweetcorn in summer and parsnips in winter. They're cheaper and widely available.
- **Plant-based protein is usually cheaper than meat** – Lentils and beans are a cheap and tasty replacement for meat in recipes like Bolognese sauce, stews and curries. Or switch some of the meat for plant-based protein to reduce the cost.
- **Save money when cooking** – If you have a microwave, slow cooker or air-fryer they're cheaper to use than an oven. If you're using an oven, batch-cooking makes the cost of each meal cheaper.

If you're struggling to afford food, there are services across the UK to help. See page 46 for details.

Questions about eating well

Here are some questions you might want to ask your healthcare team.

- Is there anything I should be eating more or less of to help prepare for treatment?
- Is there any food or drink I need to avoid because it interacts with my treatment?
- I follow a special diet to manage another medical condition. Do I need to make any changes to it?
- I'm worried about losing or gaining weight. Can you give me any advice to help?
- I'm having side effects that are affecting my ability to eat. Is there anything you recommend to help?
- I've heard about a special diet or food to help with cancer. Is this something you would recommend?
- Should I take any supplements?

Eating problems



Blood cancer and treatment side effects can sometimes make it difficult to eat and enjoy food.

Common side effects that can affect your ability to eat include feeling sick, loss of appetite, changes to your sense of taste and having a sore mouth.

It's important to talk to your hospital team if you have any side effects, including ones that affect your ability to eat. There are often effective treatments that can help.

Your doctor or clinical nurse specialist can also refer you to a dietitian. Dietitians have experience in supporting people going through cancer treatment with eating problems.

This chapter includes tips to help with common eating problems. You'll also find more advice online at [bloodcancer.org.uk/eating-problems](https://www.bloodcancer.org.uk/eating-problems)

I would come home from chemo and have a pint of ginger tea and nibble on ginger biscuits to help with the nausea. I can't even look at a ginger biscuit now, but at the time it really helped.

Hinna, diagnosed with blood cancer in 2015.



Changes to your sense of taste

Some blood cancer treatments can affect the way food tastes. Your sense of taste should go back to normal after treatment.

These are some things you could try if your sense of taste has changed:

- **If food tastes bland** add lots of extra flavour with garlic, lemon juice, herbs and spices. Marinades and dry rubs add flavour to meat, fish and vegetables. Try adding extra spice with chillies or hot sauce, but be careful if you have a sore mouth, as spicy food could be painful.
- **If food tastes metallic** metal cutlery might make it worse. Try using plastic cutlery instead. Avoid food stored in cans.
- **If food tastes too sweet** try adding salt, vinegar or lemon juice to tone it down. Chilling food before eating may also help.
- **If food tastes bitter** try balancing it with sweetness by adding sugar, honey or fruit.
- **Try different flavours and textures** to see what works for you. If something tastes odd, try it again after a few weeks, as your taste is likely to change.
- **Keep your mouth clean** by brushing your teeth regularly. Rinse with water before and after eating.



How did chemotherapy affect your ability to eat?

"I had a metallic, soapy sensation in my mouth, and food just tasted disgusting. That was the hardest side effect for me and I had a lot of tears over it.

"You don't realise until you can't enjoy food, what a big part it plays in life. Not only the pleasure, but socially as well. It's OK to be upset about it, and ask for help."

Stephen, living with blood cancer since 2019.

Nausea (feeling sick)

Nausea (feeling sick) can be a side effect of some blood cancer treatments. Your hospital team can give you anti-sickness medicine to help. You can read more about treatment for sickness at [bloodcancer.org.uk/sickness](https://www.bloodcancer.org.uk/sickness)

As well as anti-sickness medicines, there are self-help tips that can help you eat:

- Feeling hungry can make you feel more sick, so try eating little and often.
- Try eating something dry and plain – like toast, crackers or a biscuit – before you get up in the morning.
- If food smells make you feel sick, try eating cold foods, as these tend to smell less than hot foods.
- Chew your food well and sip drinks slowly.
- Avoid fried, spicy and very sweet foods. Plain, bland foods can be easier to eat.
- Distract yourself while eating by listening to music, watching TV or talking to someone on the phone.
- Sit upright while eating and for 30 minutes afterwards.
- Try food and drink containing peppermint or ginger, like peppermint or ginger tea, ginger beer and ginger biscuits.

Sore mouth

Some blood cancer treatments can cause ulcers and sores in your mouth. This is called mucositis. It can be very painful and make it difficult to eat.

There are medicines that can help, so make sure you tell your medical team if your mouth is sore. You can read about treatments for mucositis at [bloodcancer.org.uk/mucositis](https://www.bloodcancer.org.uk/mucositis)

When your mouth is sore, it's best to avoid rough or hard foods like crisps and crusty bread. Spicy and acidic foods, and foods that are too hot, can also be sore to eat.

Instead, choose soft foods like yoghurt, soft breads and scrambled eggs. You can also soften foods with sauces and gravy. Finely chopping meat and vegetables, and cooking them for longer, can make them easier to eat.

Cold milkshakes, ice cream and ice lollies can be soothing when your mouth is sore.

I learned very quickly that I couldn't have anything acidic or too hot. I lived off really cold vanilla milkshakes. They were soothing and had the calories I needed.

Kat, diagnosed with blood cancer in 2012.



Loss of appetite

Loss of appetite can be a symptom of blood cancer and a side effect of treatment. If you feel anxious, down or tired, this can also affect your appetite.

It's important to keep eating, to give your body the energy it needs. The tips below can help when your appetite is low.

- Experiment with new foods and flavours – you may find you like things you don't usually eat.
- Get some fresh air or take a short walk before eating.
- If you drink alcohol, having a small alcoholic drink before eating might boost your appetite. But check with your doctor if it's safe to have alcohol with your treatment.
- Try eating five or six small meals throughout the day instead of bigger meals.
- Smaller plates can make portions feel less overwhelming.
- Try eating lots of nutritious snacks throughout the day.
- Don't worry if you're not eating "normal" foods at "normal" times. If you fancy cereal at midnight, or ice cream in the morning, enjoy it!
- Allow yourself to have foods you might have avoided in the past. When your appetite is low, it's healthy to have high calorie foods.



How did you manage to eat when your appetite was low?

"There were times when I really didn't feel like eating and I lost a lot of weight. My medical team prescribed me high calorie drinks.

"What helped me was eating little and often, so I wasn't overwhelming myself with a big plate of dinner. I liked having a plate of 'picky bits' with all different flavours and textures."

Simone, living with blood cancer since 2018.

Constipation

Constipation can be a side effect of some blood cancer treatment, anti-sickness drugs and painkillers. It can make you feel sick and lose your appetite. These self-help tips can help to prevent or relieve constipation:

- Drink eight to 10 cups of fluid each day. Both hot and cold drinks will help.
- Eat foods high in fibre, like fresh fruit and vegetables, wholewheat breakfast cereals, lentils, beans and brown rice.
- Prune juice, prunes, fig syrup and dried apricots may help to relieve constipation.
- Do some gentle exercise each day – it can help to keep your bowels moving.

If these things don't help, speak to your doctor or clinical nurse specialist. They can prescribe treatment to help.

I've tried to get more fibre into my diet by eating some raw veg every day. Since I started that my bowel habits have really improved - everything's just running a bit smoother there.

Nigel, living with blood cancer since 2015.



If you want to talk

It can be really upsetting when you can't enjoy food in the way you're used to.

However you're feeling, you're not alone. Call our Support Service free on **0808 2080 888** or **support@bloodcancer.org.uk**

You can also talk to people who've been where you are now on our online community forum:
bloodcancer.org.uk/our-forum

Eating safely with blood cancer



When you have blood cancer, food safety is important to reduce your risk of infections from food.

Anyone can be affected by infections from food, but they're more likely to make you very unwell if you have blood cancer. This is because:

- Blood cancer and its treatment can weaken your immune system. This puts you at more risk of getting infections and makes it harder to fight them off.
- Some blood cancer treatments can damage the gut lining, making it easier for harmful bacteria to pass from your food into your bloodstream.

The good news is that food hygiene makes infections much less likely. You may also want to avoid foods that have a higher risk of carrying harmful bacteria.

Food safety

This food safety advice is recommended for everyone, but is particularly important when you're at risk of infections.

Shopping

- When buying pre-packed food, make sure the packaging is not damaged or broken.
- Avoid buying food from fridges that are overloaded, as the food might not be cold enough.
- Buy chilled and frozen foods last on your shop and get them home as quickly as possible. You could use an insulated food bag to keep foods cool on your journey home.
- Always check "use by" and "best before" dates before you buy food.
- Avoid buying food from fridges or counters where raw and cooked meats are not separated.

Storing food in the fridge

- Follow storage instructions on the packaging of food, including best before and use by dates.
- Keep your fridge temperature at 5°C or below. You can check the temperature with a fridge thermometer.
- Don't overload your fridge, as this will increase the temperature inside.

- Always cover food to prevent germs spreading.
- Store raw or defrosting meat or fish at the bottom of your fridge in a covered container, so it doesn't leak or drip.
- Don't put hot food in your fridge, as this will increase the temperature in the fridge, making all of the food less safe to eat. Cool food at room temperature and put it in the fridge within one to two hours.
- Eat leftovers you've stored in the fridge within two days.

Freezing and defrosting

- Your freezer temperature should be around -18°C .
- Make sure food is still frozen solid when you take it out of your freezer.
- Defrost food in the fridge, not at room temperature.
- If you don't have time to defrost in the fridge, use a microwave on the defrost setting straight before cooking.
- Make sure food is thoroughly defrosted before cooking.
- Don't refreeze food you've defrosted.

Washing your hands

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water before preparing, cooking or eating food, and after touching raw food (especially meat).
- Thoroughly dry your hands using a separate towel or kitchen paper. Don't use a tea towel.
- If you can't wash your hands (for example at a picnic) use hand-sanitising wipes or hand gel.
- Cover any cuts and grazes with a waterproof plaster.

Cleaning

- Keep pets away from work surfaces, food and dishes.
- Wash or change dish cloths, tea towels, oven gloves and sponges regularly. Make sure they're dry before using them again.
- Clean your work surfaces, chopping boards and knives regularly using warm, soapy water or a disinfecting cleaning product suitable for food surfaces.

Reheating food

- Don't reheat food more than once.
- It's best to avoid reheating rice or takeaway food, as harmful bacteria can survive the reheating process.

Preparing and cooking your food

- Change or wash your chopping boards and utensils between preparing raw and cooked items, to avoid spreading germs from raw food.
- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Don't wash meat before cooking. It won't get rid of harmful germs and could splash them onto other surfaces in the kitchen.
- Pre-heat the oven to make sure food is cooked at the recommended temperature.
- Cook all food thoroughly and make sure it's piping hot all the way through before eating.
- Cook meat until all the juices run clear.
- Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines and don't reduce cooking times.

Takeaways and eating out

- Stick to places that have high standards of food hygiene. You can check their rating at **ratings.food.gov.uk**

More information

We have more information about infections, the symptoms to look out for and ways to reduce your risk.

Find out more at **bloodcancer.org.uk/infection**

We also have a factsheet about understanding infection. Visit **bloodcancer.org.uk/our-booklets** to order a free copy, or call us and we'll send you one.

Higher risk foods

Some foods are more likely to contain harmful bacteria that could make you unwell. We've listed these foods on pages 32 to 34. We've also included foods in each group that are safer to eat, or ways to prepare them to reduce the risk of infection.

You might want to avoid higher risk foods if you:

- have a low level of white blood cells called neutrophils (neutropenia)
- are having any treatment that weakens your immune system
- are recovering from a stem cell transplant.

If you're not sure if you should avoid these foods, ask your hospital team. They can give you advice based on your individual situation and level of infection risk.

My hospital team asked me to avoid some foods during treatment. Once I understood the reason (to reduce my risk of infections) I didn't mind too much. And I knew it wouldn't be forever.

Kat, diagnosed with blood cancer in 2012.



Food group	Higher risk	Safe alternatives
Dairy products	<p>Uncooked mould-ripened soft cheeses with a white coating on the outside (rind), such as brie, camembert and chevre.</p> <p>Uncooked soft blue cheeses such as Danish blue, gorgonzola and roquefort.</p> <p>Unpasteurised or "raw" milk or cream from cows, goats or sheep.</p> <p>Any foods made from unpasteurised milk, such as soft goat's cheese and unpasteurised ice cream.</p> <p>Probiotic drinks and yoghurts like kefir, Yakult, Actimel.</p>	<p>Any cheese from the higher risk list is safe to eat if cooked until steaming hot. This kills bacteria and reduces the risk of infection.</p> <p>Pasteurised cheeses such as cheddar, edam, gruyere, stilton and parmesan, cottage cheese, mozzarella, feta, cream cheese, paneer, labneh, ricotta, halloumi, goat's cheese without a white coating on the outside (rind) and processed cheese spreads.</p> <p>Pasteurised milk, cream and ice cream. Check the hygiene rating of the shop or van before having soft ice cream.</p> <p>Plain, natural, fruit, Greek, bio and live yoghurt.</p>

Food group	Higher risk	Safe alternatives
Eggs	<p>Raw or runny eggs.</p> <p>Home-made foods made with raw eggs, such as mayonnaise, mousse and ice cream.</p>	<p>Well-cooked eggs so the yolk is solid.</p> <p>Shop bought foods made with pasteurised egg, such as mayonnaise and ice cream.</p>
Fish	<p>Uncooked smoked fish such as smoked salmon and trout.</p> <p>Raw fish or shellfish.</p> <p>Sushi made with raw fish or shellfish.</p>	<p>Cooked food containing smoked fish.</p> <p>Cooked fish and seafood.</p> <p>Well-cooked shellfish.</p> <p>Sushi made with vegetables or cooked fish.</p>
Meat and poultry	<p>Raw or undercooked meat.</p> <p>Unpasteurised meat or vegetarian pâté.</p> <p>Uncooked cured or smoked meats such as salami, pepperoni, chorizo and prosciutto.</p>	<p>Well-cooked meat with no trace of pink or blood.</p> <p>Pasteurised pâté in a jar.</p> <p>Cured or smoked meats cooked until steaming hot.</p> <p>Cold, pre-packed meats like ham and corned beef.</p>

Food group	Higher risk	Safe alternatives
Fruit and vegetables	<p>Damaged or bruised fruit and vegetables.</p> <p>Uncooked sprouted seeds.</p>	<p>Undamaged fruit and vegetables, including raw fruit, vegetables and salads.</p> <p>Wash fruit and vegetables before eating, including pre-packed salad, even if it says ready-washed.</p> <p>Sprouted seeds that have been cooked until steaming hot.</p>
Loose products	<p>Black pepper, dried herbs and spices bought loose from delis, farm shops or market stalls.</p> <p>Any foods from "refill stations" where people help themselves, for example cereals, nuts and dried fruits.</p>	Pre-packed, sealed packages of black pepper, dried herbs, spices and other foods.

If you want to know more

We have more information about reducing the risk of infections on our website. It includes some frequently asked questions about eating safely when you're at higher risk of infection.

Find out more at
bloodcancer.org.uk/infections-food

Helping someone to eat well



If your partner, friend or family member has blood cancer, this chapter is for you.

Helping with shopping, cooking and eating is often a big part of supporting a loved one with blood cancer. It can help them to stay as well as possible.

If the person you're supporting is going through treatment, their appetite for food might come and go, depending on how they're feeling. They might also have side effects that can cause eating problems (see pages 15 to 23).

It's important for your loved one to carry on eating if they can. This chapter gives some tips on how you can help, and some advice on looking after yourself too.

I think families need support as much as the person with blood cancer. Food is a big part of showing love in my culture, so I know my family found it hard when I couldn't eat.

Hinna, diagnosed with blood cancer in 2015.



Tips to help someone eat

These are some things that people with blood cancer, and the people supporting them, have found helpful:

- Ask them about any eating problems they're dealing with, and read up on ways to help – see pages 15 to 23 for information about common eating problems.
- Try to have a range of foods available, so there's always something to offer when they feel like eating. It doesn't always need to be home-cooked food – tinned food and ready-meals can be just as good.
- Encourage them to eat whenever they feel like it. Don't worry if it's not at regular mealtimes.
- Big meals can feel overwhelming. Try offering small meals more often instead.
- Keep snacks within easy reach, so there's always something to hand if they feel hungry.
- Try not to take it personally if they struggle to eat what you've cooked, or turn down things that are usually their favourites.
- If they have a sore mouth, offer soft foods like stews, mild curries, scrambled egg and soup. Nourishing drinks made with full fat milk, yoghurt or ice cream can be a good source of calories when eating is difficult.



How did you support your partner to eat during treatment?

“I’d plan ahead and make sure I had a few options in the house, so if Nigel didn’t want one thing, there was always something else to try. There were days when he was exhausted and nauseous, so I wanted to make sure he had food that was really easy to eat. Things like chicken curry and soup.”

Jude, whose partner Nigel has been living with blood cancer since 2015.

Caring for yourself

When someone you're close to has blood cancer, it can feel wrong to put your needs first. But it's important to take care of yourself too.

Here are some things you could try, to support your own wellbeing:

- **Eat regularly** – It might sound obvious, but when you're focused on helping someone else to eat, it can be easy to forget about feeding yourself. You need nutritious food too, to keep yourself strong and well.
- **Accept offers of help** – If people offer to cook or do shopping, take them up on it. If you don't need the food right now, put it in the freezer for another day.
- **Find a support network** – It can be really hard seeing someone you love struggle to eat. Talking about it can help, whether it's on social media, an online forum, or with people you know.
- **Find ways to relax** – You could consider yoga, breathing exercises or meditation. Or try downloading a smartphone app designed to help with stress or worry.

You can read more about looking after yourself as a carer at [bloodcancer.org.uk/carers-feelings](https://www.bloodcancer.org.uk/carers-feelings) or call us and we'll send you the information.

If you want to talk

Caring for someone with blood cancer
can have a big impact on you.

Our Support Service is here for everyone affected by
blood cancer, including friends and family. Call us free on
0808 2080 888 or email **support@bloodcancer.org.uk**

You can also talk to other people who are caring for
someone with blood cancer on our online
community forum:
bloodcancer.org.uk/our-forum

**Where can I get
more information
and support?**



If you want to know more about food and nutrition, or need practical support, help is available.

This booklet has focused on the key things you need to know about eating well with blood cancer. If you're ready to find out more, or looking for support to help you eat well, we've put together a list of resources.

This chapter covers:

- Places to get information
- Places to get support
- Help with the cost of food
- Extra support at home

I've found forums, like Blood Cancer UK's one, a great place to get support. It helps to know you're not alone, and people often have tips and tricks of things that helped them.

Fiona, living with blood cancer since 2022.



Places to get information

These websites give evidence-based information about healthy eating.

NHS website

Information about eating well, including advice on how to eat a balanced diet, food types and a guide to understanding food labels.

Visit [nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well)

British Dietetic Association (BDA)

The BDA has food fact sheets written by dietitians, about ways to eat and drink to keep your body fit and healthy.

Visit [bda.uk.com/food-health](https://www.bda.uk.com/food-health)

Food Standards Agency

Advice about food safety and hygiene. You can also check the food hygiene ratings of restaurants and takeaways.

Visit [food.gov.uk](https://www.food.gov.uk)

World Cancer Research Fund

The World Cancer Research Fund website has lots of information about healthy eating. It includes cancer and food myth-busting, and recipes aimed at people with cancer.

Visit [wcrf-uk.org/healthy-eating](https://www.wcrf-uk.org/healthy-eating)

Places to get support

Whether you're looking for advice about eating problems, want to learn new skills or just want to chat, here are some places you can get support.

The Blood Cancer UK Support Service

We will talk to you about anything that's on your mind, whether you want more information or just to chat. Call our confidential support line free on **0808 2080 888** or email **support@bloodcancer.org.uk**

The nutrition and living with cancer helpline

The nutrition and living with cancer helpline is run by the World Cancer Research Fund. It's staffed by cancer specialist dietitians who can give advice about eating problems, the current evidence about nutrition and cancer, and interactions between food and medicines.

Call **0333 034 1988** or email **helpline@wcrf.org**

Local cancer support centres

Cancer support centres such as Maggie's often offer advice about nutrition. Some also run workshops and courses to help you learn about nutrition and gain cooking skills.

Visit **maggies.org** or ask your hospital about local cancer centres.

Help with the cost of food

If you're worried about the cost of food, there are places that can help. They exist to make sure no one goes hungry, and won't judge you for needing support.

- **Food banks** – give out free emergency food packages. They sometimes provide toiletries, sanitary products, cleaning products and pet food as well. Depending on the food bank you go to, you might need a referral: from a GP, school, social worker or Citizens Advice.
- **Social supermarkets** – also known as community supermarkets or community shops, are shops that sell surplus stock from supermarkets for very reduced prices. Type "social supermarket" and your area into a search engine to find your nearest one, or ask your local council.
- **Community fridges** – are spaces where anyone can get free, good quality food that would otherwise go to waste. You can search for your nearest community fridge at **hubbub.org.uk**
- **Community meal schemes** – aim to tackle food poverty, loneliness and food waste by offering free meals and a space to meet others. Find out more at **foodcycle.org.uk**

If you're worried about money, make sure you're getting the financial support you're entitled to. You can find out about benefits and grants at **bloodcancer.org.uk/money-work** or call our Support Service on **0808 2080 888**.

Extra support at home

You might find that blood cancer or the effects of treatment mean you need extra support at home to help you eat well. This could include:

- help with shopping
- help cooking meals
- equipment to make preparing meals easier
- meal deliveries.

Speak to your GP or clinical nurse specialist if you think you might need support to look after yourself. They can arrange for a social worker to assess your situation and the support you may need.

If you're having treatment in hospital, speak to your hospital team. They can arrange for you to see an occupational therapist to discuss the support you might need at home.

Because we face it together

Finding out you have blood cancer can have a big impact on your life. But we hope it helps to know that there's a community of people out here ready to support you.

Everyone needs help at one time or another. And the most important thing to take away from this booklet is that you can get help from us when you need it, and in a way that suits you.



bloodcancer.org.uk



0808 2080 888 (calls are free and confidential)



support@bloodcancer.org.uk



bloodcancer.org.uk/forum



Blood Cancer UK



[@bloodcancer_uk](https://www.instagram.com/bloodcancer_uk)



[@bloodcancer_uk](https://twitter.com/bloodcancer_uk)



Blood Cancer UK

Thank you to our blood cancer community

Blood Cancer UK is the UK's specialist blood cancer charity. But we're much more than that – we're a community of people with blood cancer, friends, family, medical professionals, researchers and everyone who works for the charity.

Many thanks to everyone involved in making this booklet. To Anna, Fiona, Hinna, Iain, Jude, Kat, Nigel, Simone, Stephen, Sue and Teresa, for their insights into what it's like to live with blood cancer, and for steering us in the right direction. And to specialist haematology dietitians Natasha Jones and Victoria Mace and clinical nurse specialist Jodie Nightingill for checking the content.

A list of references used in this booklet is available on request. Please email information@bloodcancer.org.uk

Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information in this booklet is accurate, but you should always seek advice from your doctor if you have any concerns or questions about your health. As far as applicable by law, Blood Cancer UK cannot accept responsibility for any loss or damage resulting from any inaccuracy in this information, or in external information that we link to.

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Who are Blood Cancer UK?

We're the UK's specialist blood cancer charity, working to beat blood cancer within a generation.

Since 1960, we've invested over £500 million in research, improving treatments for leukaemia, lymphoma, myeloma, MDS and MPNs. Thanks to generous donations from our supporters, we:

- fund ground-breaking research to improve survival and quality of life
- campaign for better access to treatments and services for people with blood cancer
- provide information and support for anyone affected by any blood cancer.

Find out more at bloodcancer.org.uk

Or call us free on **0808 2080 888**



The information in this booklet was correct at the time it was printed (January 2024). Date of next full review: January 2027.

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