




# Managing Low Mood When You Have Cancer

## Information for Young People

Paediatric Psychology and Liaison Service (PPALS)  
Royal Hospital for Children and Young People, Edinburgh

When you receive a cancer diagnosis or are undergoing treatment, you might receive lots of information and have concerns about what comes next. It may take a while to process this kind of news. During this time, you might have difficult thoughts and feelings.

### *You might feel:*



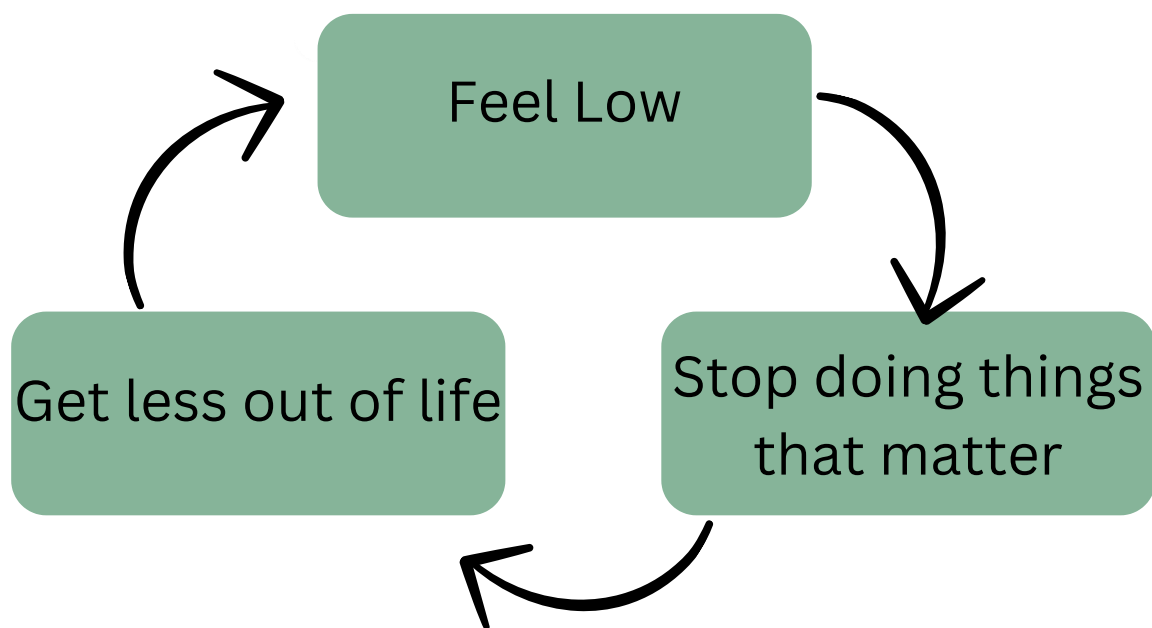
Shocked    Overwhelmed    Denial    Angry    Numb  
Confused    Frustrated    Fearful    Worried  
Determined    Hopeful    Hopeless    Stressed    Sad

These are all completely normal feelings to have when you are dealing with cancer. Another common response to have is feeling lower in mood. When someone is feeling low, they might notice that they feel more tired, down, anxious or sad. They might also notice changes to their appetite and sleep, feel less motivated to do things, or find they want to spend less time around others.

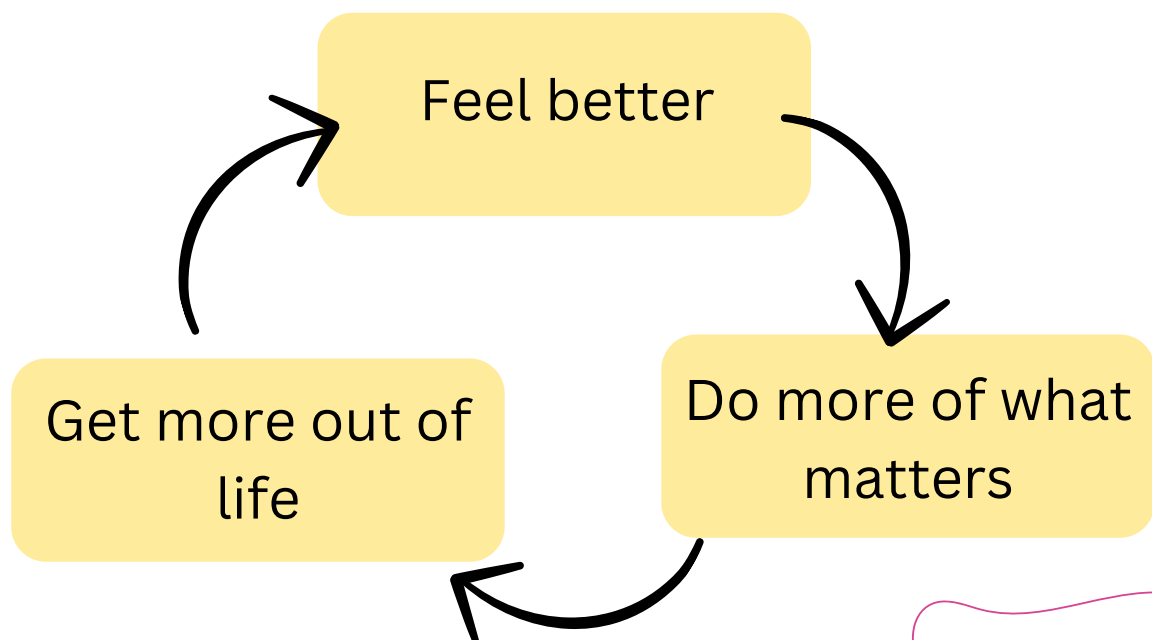
It is ok and very understandable to feel lower in mood around the time of a new diagnosis, while you are undergoing treatment or when treatment is finished. It is normal to be more tearful or sad and to not feel like doing your usual activities, especially if you are unwell. This leaflet has some ideas that might help you to manage your mood during this tricky time.

# Stuck in a Low Mood Cycle?

It is understandable to sometimes feel like doing less when we are feeling low and unwell. However, we can sometimes get stuck in a 'Low Mood Cycle' where because we are doing less of the things that matter to us, we start to feel even lower.



However, by engaging in activities that we enjoy, we can improve our mood:



# How can I get out of this vicious cycle?



## Keep a routine

Following a regular daily and bedtime routine can help improve your mood by reducing stress, helping you stay focused and continue doing the activities you love. Your routine may look a bit different if you are attending lots of appointments or staying in the hospital for treatment and it might feel like you have spare time. Try not to spend too long online, on social media, or gaming. You can add structure to your day by filling this time with school work, studying, or focusing on hobbies. Adding even just one regular daily activity is a great place to start.

## Take small steps

Create small, achievable goals that you can accomplish each day, to help you stay focused such as going for a walk, painting your nails, or reading a chapter of a book or finishing a puzzle.

Or why not try breaking down bigger goals into smaller steps that you can complete over a few days? You can use the SMART technique to create your goals.

Specific  
Measurable  
Achievable  
Relevant  
Timed

*What is my goal?*

*How will I know that I have accomplished my goal?*

*Possible actions to take to meet the goal?*

*Is this goal important to you?*

*When should the goal be accomplished by?*

# How can I get out of this Low Mood Cycle?

## Keep moving

Try to get some movement in every day if you are well enough. Even some gentle exercise can help have a positive impact on mood. You could try:

1. *Going on a family walk*
2. *Visiting the ward garden*
3. *Doing any physiotherapy exercises you have*
4. *Playing an active game*
5. *Trying some light yoga on YouTube*

Getting some daylight and fresh air in the middle of day can improve your chances of sleeping when it gets dark again at night. If you cannot go outside, spending some time outside your room can be helpful too. If you can, why not visit the TCT lounge, ECHC hub, or shop?



What is my smart goal for changing my day and helping with my mood



What might a helpful routine look like at the moment:

Morning:

Afternoon:

Evening:

*What help might I need from others to help me to achieve this goal?*



***Your parents, friends, Medical and Nursing team, Psychologist, Social Worker, Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, or Dietician might be able to support you with this!***

# Other Ideas for Helping My Mood

## Sleep

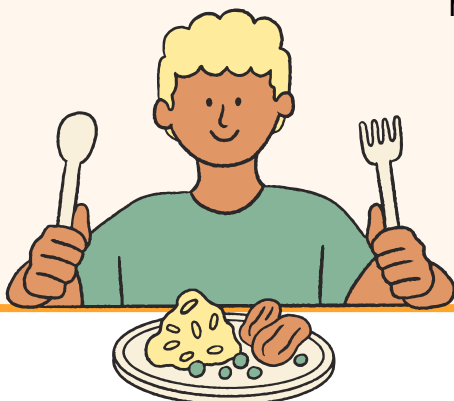
It is important to get a good night's sleep. Sleep allows your body to rest and prepare for the next day. It lets your mind recharge and can help you think more clearly, concentrate better, and feel in a good mood.

If you are well enough, try to avoid napping too much during the day as this can delay when your body feels ready for sleep at night. If you do need to lie down or nap, make sure that you do this on your bed where you would normally sleep and try to keep your nap short. This will help your brain learn that it is time for sleep whenever you get into bed at night.



## Aim for a balanced diet

Having a balance of fun and healthy foods in your diet and keeping hydrated can have a positive impact on mood by reducing likelihood of headaches, improving concentration, and keeping you energised. It is important to avoid things like sugary snacks, coffee, tea, fizzy juice and energy drinks in the afternoon and evening, as these foods and drinks can stay in your body and keep you awake for a long time, stopping you from getting a good night's sleep.

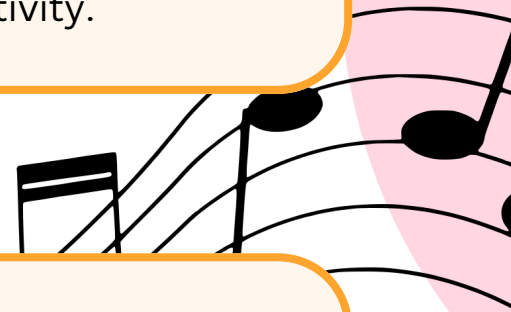


*Your team can offer advice if you are having trouble maintaining your diet or eating while undergoing treatment*

# Other Ideas for Helping My Mood

## Talk about it

Chatting to a friend or family member over a cup of tea or out on a walk can help lift your mood and lets other knows how they can best support you. Why not make space in your day for worry time, when you can talk things through with a family member or friend? If you notice any worries forming throughout the day, make a note to think about them later during worry time and try to switch your focus back to what you are doing or a fun, distracting activity.



## Make time for relaxation

Relaxation can reduce anxiety and pain levels, improve sleep, and help you to feel calmer and more in control. Why not make time for a calm activity once a day such as:

*Doodling/colouring*

*Listening to music*

*Reading a book*

*Knitting*

*Trying a breathing or grounding exercise*

*Try a mindfulness app like Head Space*



More information on the next few pages!

# Other Ideas for Helping My Mood

## Manage Unhelpful Thoughts

Having a health condition can be stressful, so it is normal to experience more negative or unhelpful thoughts than usual.

Why not try the following tips for managing negative or unhelpful thoughts?

**Take your mind off thoughts by playing a distraction game (e.g., thinking of a different song or movie for every letter of the alphabet) or a grounding exercise.**

**Try keeping a diary to get your thoughts and worries out of your mind at bedtime and down on paper instead.**

**Ask yourself – is this thought helping me to get to where I want to be? What would a friend say to me about this?**

Share the unhelpful thought with a friend or an adult you trust



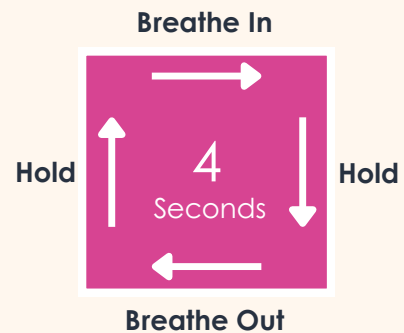


# Other Ideas for Helping My Mood

## Take a deep breath

Controlled breathing is a simple and quick exercise which can help you to relax. When we are feeling stressed or anxious we can experience lots of unpleasant bodily sensations and often our breathing gets quicker.

**Slowing down our breathing can help to show our body that we are safe and can relax. With practice, you can use this exercise anywhere, at any time.**



## Grounding

Draw your focus away from worries by trying a quick grounding activity. You can use the 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 method to focus on what is going on around you. Start by sitting in a comfortable place and taking a deep breath. Then think of:



- 5 things you can see**
- 4 things you can touch**
- 3 things you can hear**
- 2 things you can smell/taste**



... And take **1 deep breath**



# When might I need more help?

## Who to talk to...

If your low mood worsens or does not improve after a few weeks, speak to an adult you trust, your medical team or GP for further information and advice on how to manage your mood.

Sometimes, it might be helpful to meet with a member of the PPALS psychology team. We can help to support you with your low mood and mental health. Your medical team might discuss this with you and, if you agree, they can make a referral.

Sometimes, young people may notice thoughts of wanting to die or to harm themselves. If you notice this, speak to an adult you trust so that they can support you to get some help. In emergencies, please contact your GP or **NHS 24** on **111** in the first instance or attend the Emergency Department.

For emotional support, try contacting Childline - Call: 0800 111. Webchat: [childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor](https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor). Or try YoungMinds Crisis Messenger - A 24/7 text messaging service for young people in crisis - **Text YM to 85258**

