

1. My Appearance

Both cancer and its treatments can often have an impact on your appearance and how you feel about it. Some people find concerns about their appearance to be one of the hardest parts of having cancer. People vary, of course as to how much of their identity is invested in their general appearance or particular parts of their bodies. This affects the impact that a changed appearance has on particular individuals. So there can be huge variability in terms of how people respond to changes in their appearance. The effects of treatment such as hair loss, weight gain, scarring etc. can impact on everyday encounters and lead to anxiety, anger, frustration and distress, but these feelings are perfectly natural and normal. Stress alone can lead to weight loss. Some patients feel that others see them as ill and therefore will treat them differently, whereas some feel that the change in their appearance is a constant reminder of the illness. It does not matter how large or obvious a change in appearance is, whether the person is a man or a woman, if the change is temporary or permanent, or how old they are, it is how the change in appearance makes them feel that is important.

How can I manage these feelings?

- It is important to recognise that your concerns about your appearance are entirely normal and that many others often feel the same.
- What impact does your change of appearance have on how you feel about your body, and more generally on how you feel about yourself. For example, how do you feel now when you look at your body? How have you been feeling about yourself since having your operation/treatment?
- If you find you have started to avoid other people because of how you feel you look, consider how you might slowly confront these changes. You might start by looking at the part of your body you are most concerned about. Look at it (and touch it) until what you see no longer has much of an impact on you. It may take up to an hour at first before you become bored looking at it, but remember that feeling bored by something means that you are no longer having such a strong emotional reaction to it. Do this every day until you feel more confident looking at yourself. In time, if you wish and it seems appropriate, gradually allow other people to look at this part of your body so that they can get used to it and you can get used to them looking at your body once again. Try to say to the other person what you are feeling so that they can reassure you.
- You may feel you need extra support (e.g. the company of another person) as you re-engage with normal activities that involve seeing other people. If you worry about going out it can be helpful to talk through what you imagine might happen and, importantly, how you would handle it. Talking about your worries can be helpful, perhaps with a family member or close friend. Alternatively, if you feel particularly stuck with your appearance concerns, you may find talking to a professional such as a clinical psychologist more helpful.
- Other people in your life, particularly partners, might also be having trouble adjusting to your altered appearance. Again, it is normal that people take time to adjust to change so try to be patient and understanding, rather than offended by their reactions. They may find it easy to talk to you about their concerns but they also might find it easier talking them through with a professional first.
- Joining a support group with other people who are experiencing the same problems as you can sometimes help.
- Some appearance changes can be managed using creative practical solutions. For example,
 - Surgery scars – camouflage, corrective/plastic surgery
 - Amputation – prosthetics
 - Hair loss – hats and scarves, wigs, make up (such as eyebrow pencil) etc.

It is important to note that **plastic or reconstructive surgery** will not restore the body or its appearance to exactly how it was before treatment and there will still be scars of some kind. In fact, the decisions to undergo surgery to try to restore or reconstruct appearance can be difficult to make, so it is important to talk to health professionals about the options available in your case.

Local Resources:

| Resource | Contact |
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| <p>Changing Faces Registered charity providing skin camouflage clinics.</p> | <p>Available locally at Derriford Hospital. Can self-refer in Devon or through GP. Support service helpline: 0300 0120275 Mon-Fri 10am-4pm. For advice/information and emotional support about living with a condition/injury that affects your appearance. www.changingfaces.org.uk support@changingfaces.org.uk</p> |
| <p>Lymphoedema Service This is a nurse led service providing individualised care and encouraging self-management through specialised treatment and education with the aim to allow the individual to lead as independent a life as possible.</p> | <p>Located at St Lukes' Turnchapel site and requires a referral from a consultant, GP or CNS.</p> |
| <p>Wig Service An advisor from Browns Specialist Salon attends the Mustard Tree Centre every Thursday from 10am to 2pm to offer advice to those patients who may lose their hair due to chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Wig Service also available locally in Plymouth. Please contact the Tavistock Head Office for more details</p> | <p>Held at: Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre To book an appointment please contact the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre on: 01752 430060 Appointments are available Thursdays from 10am to 2pm and last approximately 1 hour. A referral form is required from a member of your medical team Tavistock Head Office: 01822 810181</p> |
| <p>Prosthetic Fitter Following a mastectomy, you will receive an appointment to see the prosthetic fitter, usually 6 weeks after the operation. If you have had a wide local excision (lumpectomy) you have the option of self-referring to the Primrose unit for information and advice regarding breast form</p> | <p>Primrose Unit Level 7 Derriford Hospital 01752 432066</p> |
| <p>Bra Specialist Excellent fitting service with professional help and advice.</p> | <p>Undercover Lingerie contact number: 01566 775756 info@undercoveronline.co.uk www.undercoveronline.co.uk 7A Church Street, Launceston, PL15 8AW Mon – Fri 9am – 5pm Sat 9am – 3pm</p> |
| <p>Look Good, Feel Better Offers free cosmetic makeovers, skincare and makeup advice for women during their cancer treatment. The 2 hour workshops are informative and lively but most of all, fun - making this particular visit to hospital something to look forward to. The basic thinking behind the programme is if you look good, it may help you feel better</p> | <p>Held at: Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre 2 hour group-based sessions for patients only. To book please contact the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre on 01752 430060 http://www.lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk/</p> |
| <p>Boots Event Evenings Trained Boots No7 Macmillan advisors, give free face-to-face advice about caring for your skin and nails.</p> | <p>Held at: Boots - Drake Circus, Plymouth To book or for more information please contact the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre on: 01752 430060</p> |
| <p>Boots Feel More Like You – No7 Beauty Adviser Get help with managing the visible side effects of cancer treatment from Boots Macmillan Beauty Advisers, who have been trained to provide support to people living with cancer.</p> | <p>Held at: Boots - Drake Circus, Plymouth To book an appointment please call: 01752 266271 (choose option: 5, option 1, to get to the beauty department) http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Livingwithandaftercancer/Symptomssideeffects/VisibleSideeffects/Boots-Macmillan-Beauty-Advisors.aspx</p> |

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| Skincare & Headwear Drop In Clinic This is an opportunity for you to spend time with a Boots consultant who will be able to advise you with managing the effects of treatment on hair, skin and nails. | Held at: Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre Drop in session. Once a month – patients only. For information please contact the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre on: 01752 430060 |
| Mustard Tree Cancer Support & Triangle Drop In Centres Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers | Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital: Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 Kingsbridge: Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 Liskeard: Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 Tavistock: Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935 |
| Other Resources | Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist Nurse, District Nurse, Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist. |

Local Resources continued:

National Resources:

| Resource | Contact Details |
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| National Bra Fitting Services A list of companies for any enquiries regarding lingerie products and services following breast surgery | Nicola Jane—0845 2657595 www.nicolajane.com Silima—01925 220524 www.silima.co.uk Eloise—0845 2255080 www.eloise.co.uk Amoena—0238 0270345 www.amoena.co.uk |
| Breast Cancer Care HeadStrong service | www.breastcancercare.org.uk/breast-cancer-services/information-support-sessions/headstrong |
| Let's Face It | www.lets-face-it.org.uk |
| Healthtalk online | www.healthonline.org |
| Look Good, Feel Better | www.lookgoodfeelbetter.co.uk/site/index.cfm 01372 747 500 |
| Lymphoedema Support Network | www.lymphoedema.org 0207 3514480 (information and support) |
| Changing Faces Provides support for disfigurement to face, body or hands | 0845 4500275 |
| Macmillan Cancer Support Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer. | www.macmillan.org.uk 0808 808 0000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm) |

Further information:

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| Macmillan booklets: – Available free from the Mustard Tree Macmillan Centre |
| Feel more like you |
| Body Image |
| Coping with hair loss |
| Sexuality and cancer |
| Talking about your cancer |
| How are you feeling? |
| Understanding chemotherapy |
| Understanding radiotherapy |
| Understanding lymphoedema |