

## 41. Difficulty Making Plans

It can be very difficult to make plans for the future when confronted with the diagnosis of cancer. Those plans already in place may have had to be altered due to the number of hospital appointments, the severity of the symptoms, or treatment side effects. Making future plans can be difficult enough but there may be other people to consider, and other uncertainties, which can make this even harder. Some people develop a fear of 'tempting fate'; in other words, they fear making any kind of assumptions about their future (e.g. *"If I make a plan for next summer, something is bound to go wrong. It's safer not to plan anything"*).

However, it is essential to everyone's wellbeing that they have joyful things in the future to look forward to, and things to work towards and achieve. Without such plans we can quickly lose a sense of motivation in our lives, and our mood will consequently deteriorate into depression and hopelessness. Furthermore, if we stop being actively involved in the world around us we can quickly lose confidence in ourselves (for example, if you don't leave the house much it can seem a bit scary when you do; if you don't see your friends much you can imagine they wouldn't want to see you, etc.).

### How can I manage these feelings?

- The first step is to fully acknowledge the feelings you are having. Sometimes people try to dismiss these feelings, fight them or become caught up in them. So rather than beat yourself up for having these feelings work towards accepting that many people do and they are understandable in the circumstances (your life may well have been turned upside down since your diagnosis). Once you have been able to acknowledge your feelings, you can think about making a wise response in relation to them.
- Even though it may be hard, try to think about your future. It may not be the future you would have wished for yourself, and it may even feel hard to predict, but having things to look forward to and things to achieve is a big part of what makes life worth living.
- Sometimes the experience of cancer helps people decide on new priorities for their lives. This may mean spending more time with your family, going on that holiday you have long dreamed about, or taking up a new hobby. Just thinking about these things and making plans can help remind you that you still know how to make choices. Remember that it will help if you can make plans for when active treatment is finished.
- Think about short term plans that you could make: things to achieve or work towards (e.g. *"I will plan to build up my daily walks from 10 minutes a day to 20 minutes"*; *"By this weekend I will contact two of the friends I have not spoken to in months"*).
- Make sure your goals are **specific** (you know exactly what needs to be done), **achievable** (it is something you are likely to succeed in doing), **measurable** (you know when you have achieved it and can therefore "tick it off") and **time-limited** (you agree to achieve the goal by a certain time).
- Having short term plans can help regain a sense of control in an otherwise uncontrollable situation; planning for the day ahead ensures that by the evening you will have the satisfying feeling that that you have achieved something with the day.
- Some people find that planning for every possible future that they can imagine eventually helps them feel in control because whatever the future holds they have a plan up their sleeve.
- It can be useful to speak with your family or friends so they can help you make realistic plans for both the short term and long term.
- It may help you to simply explore your options with a non-judgemental person such as a professional or spiritual leader who is not emotionally involved in the situation.

## Local Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p><b>Livewell South West: Mindfulness</b> Mindfulness practice can help you develop the ability to deal with life's pressures. Mindfulness meditation is a skill you can develop and a form of self-awareness training that helps you get to know yourself more fully, think more clearly and in the present moment.</p> <p><b>Managing Anxiety</b> This one hour workshop provides information on the psychological and physical symptoms of anxiety and strategies to manage this including breathing, goal setting and cognitive behaviour therapy</p> <p><b>Managing Low Mood</b> This one hour workshop provides information on the psychological symptoms of low mood as well as providing strategies to manage this</p> <p><b>Managing Stress</b> This one hour workshop introduces the symptoms of stress and how the body responds, and provides simple strategies to manage this</p>	<p><b>Livewell South West:</b> To book a place on any of the 1 hour workshops please call: Tel: 01752 435419 or Email: plymouthoptions@nhs.net</p>
<p><b>Mustard Tree Cancer Support &amp; Triangle Drop In Centres</b> Ask questions, share concerns, offers a range of services including benefits advice. Support, advice and information for cancer patients and their carers</p>	<p><b>Mustard Tree, Derriford Hospital:</b> Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm 01752 430060/01752 431468 <b>Kingsbridge:</b> Tuesdays 10am to 4pm 01548 852349 <b>Liskeard:</b> Thursdays 10am to 4pm 01579 373500 <b>Tavistock:</b> Fridays 10am to 4pm 01822 615935</p>
<p><b>Other Resources</b></p>	<p>Your GP, Oncology Doctor, Specialist Nurse, District Nurse, Occupational Therapist or Physiotherapist.</p>

## National Resources:

Resource	Contact Details
<p><b>Macmillan Cancer Support</b> Provide comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of cancer.</p>	<p>www.macmillan.org.uk <b>0808 808 0000</b> (Mon-Fri, 9am-8pm)</p>

## Further Information:

<p><b>Macmillan Cancer Support booklets:</b> – available free from the Mustard Tree Cancer Support Centre</p>	<p><b>BHOC Information and Support Centre</b></p>
<p>How are you feeling?</p>	<p><i>Managing the Stress of Cancer</i></p>