



**GIG**  
CYMRU  
**NHS**  
WALES

Ymddiriedolaeth  
GIG Felindre  
Velindre NHS Trust

## **Living With Uncertainty**

Nothing can prepare a person for the shock of first hearing the words "It's CANCER." Many people who have been diagnosed with cancer understandably feel worried or uncertain about their future as soon as they are diagnosed, during and after completing cancer treatment. Understanding the reasons why you are feeling this way, and knowing what you can do to cope, can help you feel more confident in living a meaningful life.

Many people think that before cancer, they had fewer doubts or unknowns in their lives. Having cancer can make you more aware of uncertainties, because you may never have expected to get cancer in the first place. You may find yourself thinking, "If I can get cancer, then what else can happen?" This general feeling of uncertainty in your daily life is common for people who have experienced cancer.

At any stage of cancer, you may also find that your life has changed in unexpected ways. You may feel uncertain about these changes and worry about what your life is going to be like with or after cancer. You may feel unsure about many

other aspects of your life. This is called **living with uncertainty**.

## **Top Tips For Living With Uncertainty**

When you are living with uncertainty, you may find you feel like your whole world has been turned upside and you no longer have control over your life. Sometimes the fear of uncertainty can limit enjoyment in life and doing things that are important to you. Uncertainty may be a part of your life now, but it does not have to affect your quality of life. There is no right or wrong way to feel about living with uncertainty. However, there are ways to help you cope with the challenges that it might bring.

- A sense of routine and structure in our daily lives help us to feel contained and in control. You may find your usual lifestyle has changed a lot since your diagnosis but wherever possible, try to keep to your usual, familiar routine to help maintain a sense of normality.
- When we are worried or overwhelmed, it is very easy to become caught up in these feelings. This can make it much harder to do the thing you need or want to do. Try not to put off or avoid the things you need to get done. Break them down into small, achievable steps and ask for support from other people if you need it.

Reward yourself for your achievements whenever you can.

- At difficult times it is important to keep a sense of achievement and enjoyment. Make time to carry on doing the things you enjoy, such as your hobbies, as much as possible. This can help to reduce stress levels and lift your mood.
- When we are faced with uncertainty, we often try to control it, get rid of it or fight it, (e.g. trying to find answers to questions such as “will my cancer get worse?”, “will it come back?”, “what will happen to me in the future?”). Often these control strategies do not work as there is no obvious “solution” or “answer”. This can leave us feeling even more distressed.

Focusing on the things you can control and giving yourself permission to let go of the things you can't control won't get rid of the worries, but can help you to feel more confident that you can manage.

- Events, thoughts, feelings and sensations can trigger automatic habits of thinking, such as “I can't cope with this”, “If I was in control things would be easier” that may lead to you feeling worse. By becoming more

aware of your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, from moment-to-moment, you can become aware of what is helpful for you and what isn't. This awareness can give more choice to respond in a way that is most helpful for you, rather than staying in 'auto-pilot' mode.

- Thoughts and feelings continually change but no matter how bad they get, they cannot harm you. Sooner or later they will change or pass. Distress is normal and it is OK to feel this way but you can choose to step back from it and not to let it take over.
- It can often be easy to forget to appreciate the small things when we are surrounded by uncertainty. Stepping back from the distressing thoughts and feelings can help you to make the most of what you are doing right now. Try to notice what is happening in the world around you, rather than what is whirring away in your mind.
- It is easy to lose sight of the things that give you a sense of purpose when you are stuck in uncertainty. Think about the things that you value and that you feel are important. By letting go of the worries you can't control, you can put more time and energy into the things that are meaningful to you.

- When your future feels uncertain, often people stop making plans or setting themselves goals for fear of “tempting fate”. However, having something to work towards and look forward to is important. Set yourself goals to work towards something meaningful. This can help you to feel motivated and give you a sense of achievement. Remember to take baby steps! Small changes over time can make a big difference.

## Sources of Support

If you would like further support for living with uncertainty you can find this from the following services:

- Your GP (you may be referred to the surgery's counselling service).
- Macmillan Cancer Support: [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk) or 0808 808 0000.
- Tenovus: [www.tenovus.org.uk](http://www.tenovus.org.uk) or 0808 808 1010.
- Leigh Bodilly, Velindre Patient and Carer Information and Support Co-ordinator: For information on support services in your local area – 029 20196132.
- The Velindre Living with Uncertainty Group: Helps you to live your life in a meaningful way despite the worries about things that are uncertain.
- Your Consultant or Clinical Nurse Specialist can provide you information about the services available to you and request a referral to the group programmes or Clinical Psychology and Counselling team at Velindre Cancer Centre.



This leaflet was written by health professionals. The information contained in this leaflet is evidence based. It has been approved by doctors, nurses and patients. It is reviewed and updated every 2 years.

Prepared April 2014

