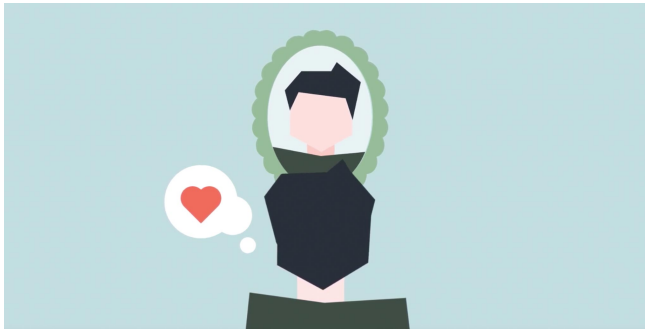
CANCER MIND CARE

Date: Sep 4 2026

Body Image



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Topics covered on this page

- What is body image?
- Common changes your body may experience
- Helpful tips
- Further information and support services

What is body image?

Cancer and its treatments can affect how your body looks, feels and functions. This can lead to changes in your body image.

Your body image includes the way you see your body and how you think and feel about your body.

The way we look is often important to us and may also be linked to how we feel about ourselves.

What are some common changes your body may experience?

Cancer and cancer treatment can cause a number of changes to your body.

Changes may include:

- Scars from surgery
- Hair loss due to chemotherapy or radiotherapy
- Hormonal changes
- Weight changes
- Loss of a body part
- Disfigurement
- Skin and tissue changes
- Adjusting to differences in how your body feels, moves and functions for example fatigue or loss of strength
- Sexual changes and feelings around intimacy

How might these changes affect your body image?

Some people find these physical changes lead to differences in the way they see their body and feel about their body. Some people feel more negatively towards their body. They may feel self-conscious about changes, or a loss of confidence in their body and what it can do or see their body as weak and vulnerable.

Others may experience changes to their body as positive. Positive changes may include a greater awareness and appreciation of your body and its abilities or greater motivation to look after yourself.

It is normal to feel:

- Anxious
- Less confident
- Angry
- Grief and loss about changes
- Sad or helpless
- Shocked and disappointed
- Or a combination of all of these emotions
- Some people with cancer feel they are no longer the person they used to be or worry about intimate and sexual relationships.

Changes in the way you think and feel about your body may also lead to changes in what you do, for example some people find themselves covering up parts of their body when they feel self-conscious or feel nervous about going out.

What might be helpful your body image has changed?

- Your body will take time to heal and recover from cancer treatment. Give yourself some time to adjust to changes and allow yourself to take it at your own pace
- Look after your body through eating well, exercising, sleeping and taking time to relax and engage in activities you enjoy
- Reach out and discuss changes and concerns with family and friends (your support team) as you will often find they can reassure you about how these changes may affect your relationship with them
- If you feel safe to do so share your worries about how you are looking and feeling with your intimate / sexual partner. In this way they will have some understanding of how you are feeling and can gain some understanding from your perspective of what is going on for you
- Reach out to other cancer survivors to share your experience and hear about other people's experiences
- Try not to avoid looking at or dealing with body changes or activities such as going out, looking in the mirror or shopping for clothes. Avoiding these things may be a relief in the short term, but it may make things more difficult in the long term. Everyone will have an individual response and you will know when you are ready to make this step
- It can be helpful to remind yourself of other important parts of your life and unique aspects of your personality as a whole. We often tie our appearance to our identity, so it is important to remember that we have our own strengths and desirable qualities that continue to exist even in the face of changes to our appearance

It may be important to speak to your doctor, nurse or social worker about changes you are experiencing and how they can support you. Discussing how to take positive action can be empowering. Health services may have resources available to support people undergoing body changes, including wig services and scalp cooling.

You may also find you would like support from a mental health professional to work through any changes and how you feel about them. Explore your options listed at the bottom of this page.

Watch Video

Further information and support services

Further information

Look good feel better
Visit Website

Cancer Council NSW – Changed body image information
Visit Website

University Health Network (Canada) - Managing Body Image Concerns After Cancer Treatment Booklet
Download Guide

Cancer Council Victoria – Hair loss information
Visit Website

Finding a mental health professional

You can begin by speaking to your General Practitioner (GP). GPs can discuss your emotional concerns with you and can link you to supports in the local community, such as a psychologist or social worker.

You can also speak to your cancer clinician. Most cancer services have a range of psychological support options including psychologists, social workers, psychiatric nurses and psychiatrists. If this isn't available at your local health service, ask them what support is available in the local community.

You can find a local Psychologist with a referral or a mental health care plan from your GP.

Search for a local Psychologist
Visit Website

Search for a local Psychiatrist
Visit Website

Health Direct

Health Direct provides information about what a mental health care plan is and how you can work with your GP to access a mental health care plan.

Visit Website

Relaxation and mindfulness

Cancer Council NSW – Finding calm during cancer

Meditation and relaxation practices

Visit Website

Headspace

Meditation and mindfulness app

Visit Website

Smiling Mind

Web and app-based meditation program

Visit Website

Cancer support services

Cancer Council Victoria

A non-profit cancer charity organisation involved in cancer research, patient support, cancer prevention and advocacy.

Call 13 11 20 to speak with a cancer nurse
Visit Website
Support Groups
Cancer Connect peer support
Online Community

WeCan

A supportive care website

Visit Website

Telephone support services

Beyond Blue

All calls are with a trained mental health professional, and completely confidential. They will only ask you your first name and you can remain completely anonymous.

Phone: 1300 224 636
Visit Website

Lifeline

Lifeline provides all Australians experiencing a personal crisis have access to 24-hour crisis support by trained professional

Phone: 13 11 14
Visit Website

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Content is sourced from published research literature, grey literature sources (e.g. clinical guidelines) and opinions of clinical experts. It is not intended to reflect all of the available evidence and is not intended to be exhaustive.

The authors acknowledge that it is possible that other relevant guidelines or scientific findings may have been published since the development of the website.