



COMING HOME GUIDE

Caring for someone with cancer: a family guide

For England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Version 1.0.1 • October 2026. Next review: October 2027

About this guide

This guide is correct at October 2026, version 1.0. We've written it in good faith as general guidance to help carers and families. It isn't legal, financial or medical advice. Rules and rates change, so before you act, please make sure you have the latest version of this guide and look at the official sources: GOV.UK, Social Security Scotland, nidirect and your local council. To the extent the law allows, we can't accept liability for any errors or omissions, or for decisions made on the strength of this guide. In a medical emergency call 999. For urgent advice, contact NHS 111.

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How to use this guide

Version 1.0.1. October 2026. Next review: October 2027. Information read on 3 October 2026. We review this guide every year, and straight away if a service or rule it describes changes.

Who this guide is for: you, if you look after someone with cancer. That might be your partner, your mum or dad, a brother or sister, a grown-up child or a close friend. You might live with them, live nearby, or help from far away. It covers England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

How to use it: you don't need to read it all at once. Section 1 is about you. Sections 2 and 3 explain who's in the cancer team. Section 4 is about appointments, and section 5 covers everyday life at home. Sections 7 and 8 cover money, work and your rights. Section 9 is about talking about the future, and section 10 is about looking after yourself. Every fact has a source and a date, and the full list is in "Sources" at the back.

Guidance, not advice. This guide is about the carer's side of things: who's who, getting to appointments, money, work and looking after yourself. It can't tell you what's happening for the person you care for, what will happen next, or what care or medicines they need. Only the cancer team, their GP and the health professionals who know them can do that. If you have a question about their cancer or their care, ask the cancer team.

If you're worried about their health, contact their GP or NHS 111. In an emergency call 999.

Write down the 24-hour number your cancer team gives you, and keep it by the phone.

Cancer team (hospital and team name):

24-hour number:

Use it in the way the cancer team has told you. In an emergency call 999.

For cancer support, call the Macmillan Support Line on 0808 808 00 00, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm (see "Who to call").

01

You're not on your own



Hearing that someone you love has cancer can turn life upside down. You might feel shocked, frightened, angry or numb. You might want to fix everything at once, or not want to think about it at all. You might feel strong one day and overwhelmed the next.

All of that is common. Macmillan says that when someone close to you has cancer, you may have many different feelings ([Macmillan, Supporting someone with cancer, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

There can be a lot of waiting: for appointments, for results, for news. Families often say it feels like always catching up. This guide is here to help you organise, so there's a little less to hold in your head.

You're a carer, even if it doesn't feel like it. Macmillan says you're a carer if you give any unpaid help and support to someone with cancer who couldn't manage without you. That can mean emotional support, helping with daily tasks, driving them to appointments, talking to professionals for them, or helping with personal care. Seeing yourself as a carer can be an important step in getting help ([Macmillan, Looking after someone with cancer, reviewed 1 Apr 2023](#)).

What this guide does: it brings together what the NHS, the government and the cancer charities say about the team around you, appointments, everyday life, money, work and the help you can ask for.

What it doesn't do: it doesn't say anything about their cancer, their care, or what to expect. The cancer team will tell you what to expect and who to call. Ask the cancer team.

02

Cancer in plain words



The NHS says there are more than 200 different types of cancer, and that people with cancer are looked after by a team of specialists ([NHS, Cancer, reviewed 27 May 2025](#)).

Because every type and every person is different, this guide doesn't describe any type of cancer or any kind of care. You may hear words like surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy at appointments. If you want to know what they mean for the person you care for, ask the cancer team. They can talk this through, in as much or as little detail as you both want.

If you'd like general information about a type of cancer, Macmillan Cancer Support and Cancer Research UK both have information on their websites, and both have nurses you can talk to (see "Who to call").

If you're worried about their health, contact their GP or NHS 111. In an emergency call 999.

03

The cancer team



Who's who

The NHS says people with cancer are looked after by a team of specialists (NHS, Cancer). Macmillan calls this hospital team a multidisciplinary team (MDT) ([Macmillan, Macmillan nurses, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

The specialist nurse. Macmillan says a clinical nurse specialist (CNS) who specialises in the type of cancer is usually the main contact at the hospital, and is called the key worker. The CNS usually co-ordinates care, can give practical and emotional support to the person and their family, and can refer them to other services. They'll give a phone number. There may not always be a CNS for every type of cancer, so you can ask the doctor whether there's a nurse specialist to talk to (Macmillan, Macmillan nurses).

Macmillan nurses are specialist nurses who work in hospitals, hospices and the community. The person's own doctor or nurse can refer them (Macmillan, Macmillan nurses).

The GP stays part of the picture. Tell the GP practice you're the carer, so they know who you are.

Palliative care teams help with comfort and quality of life. The NHS says end of life care can be at home, in hospital, in a care home or in a hospice ([NHS, End of life care, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). Meeting a palliative care team doesn't have to mean the end is near. Ask the cancer team when they can be involved.

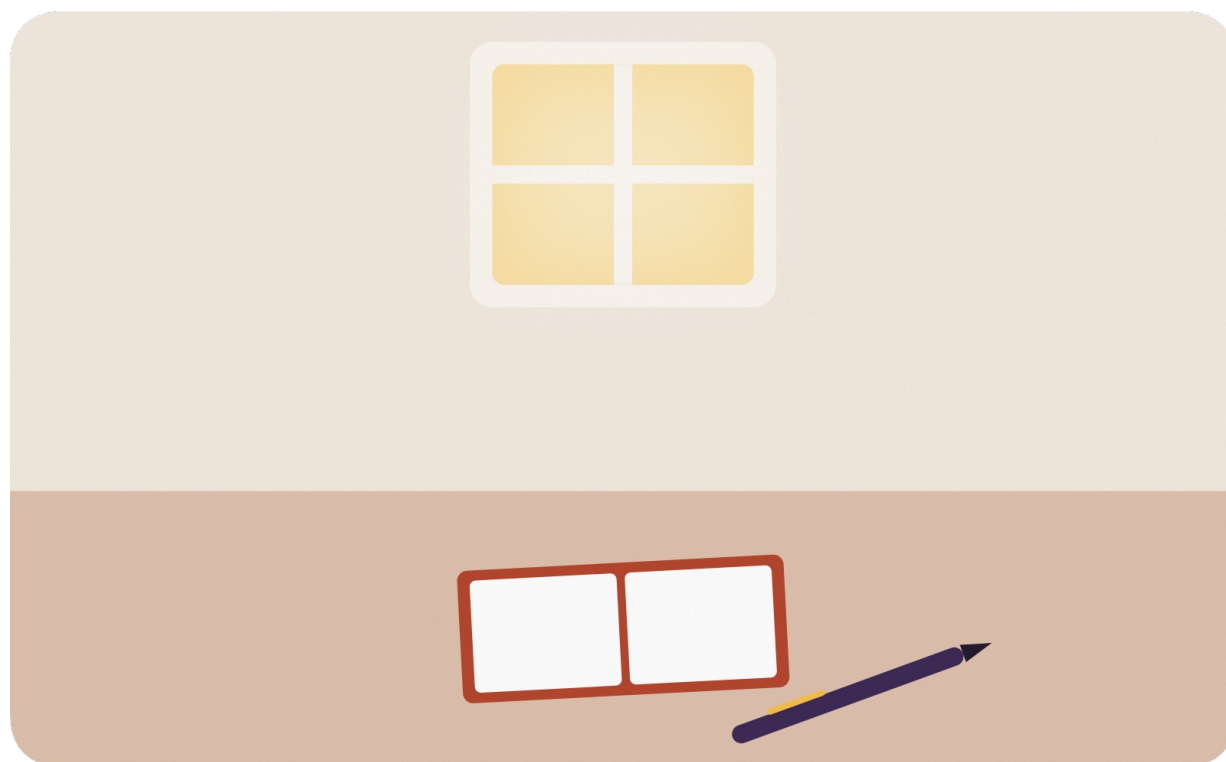
A plan for support

Macmillan describes a Holistic Needs Assessment (HNA): a discussion with someone from the healthcare team about all areas of life, not just health. The person fills in a short checklist or answers some questions, talks through what matters most to them, and they agree a care plan together, sometimes called a personalised care and support plan ([Macmillan, Holistic Needs Assessment, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). If they'd like you there, you can go too. Ask the CNS about it.

Keeping track

There can be a lot of people, letters and appointments. Some families find these help:

- one notebook, or one shared place, for names, numbers, dates and questions
- one shared calendar for appointments
- one person as the main family contact for the team, if that suits you and the person you care for



04

Appointments and hospital visits



Going with them

Many people like company at appointments. Others prefer to go alone, or to choose who comes. Ask what they'd like, and go with what they say.

If you do go, some families find these help:

- Write questions down before you go, and take the list with you.
- Take notes, or ask whether it's all right to record the conversation, so you can listen again later.
- Ask the team to explain anything you don't understand, or to write it down.
- Take a bag for long days: a drink, a snack, a phone charger, a book, a warm layer, and any letters from the hospital.
- Before you leave, ask who to contact with questions, and how.

Getting there

Travel costs (England). If they're referred to hospital for specialist NHS care, and they or their partner get certain benefits or are on a low income, they may be able to claim back reasonable travel costs under the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme (HTCS). The cost of someone travelling with them can be claimed if their healthcare professional says it's medically necessary ([NHS, Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme, reviewed 14 Aug 2023](#)). In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, ask the hospital about help with travel costs.

Hospital transport. If getting there is hard, ask the cancer team or the GP whether they can have hospital transport.

Parking. See "Hospital parking" in section 7.

Hospital stays. If they go into hospital, our Hospital discharge guide explains what should happen before they come home ([Coming Home, Hospital discharge](#)). Macmillan says to tell the healthcare team that you're a carer, so you can be part of the plans for going home (Macmillan, Looking after someone with cancer).



05

Day to day at home



Keeping life going

Life doesn't stop, even when it feels as though it has. Keep doing what they enjoy, in whatever way works now: a walk, a favourite programme, friends visiting, a meal out, time in the garden. The person is still the person, and their choices matter.

Sharing the load

Many people want to help but don't know how. It can help to have a short list ready: a lift to an appointment, a meal, shopping, school runs, walking the dog, an hour's company. Saying yes to offers isn't a weakness.

Talking, and not talking

Some people want to talk about cancer a lot. Some don't want to talk about it at all, or only with certain people. Both are common. It's their news to share, so ask who they'd like to know, and what they'd like said.

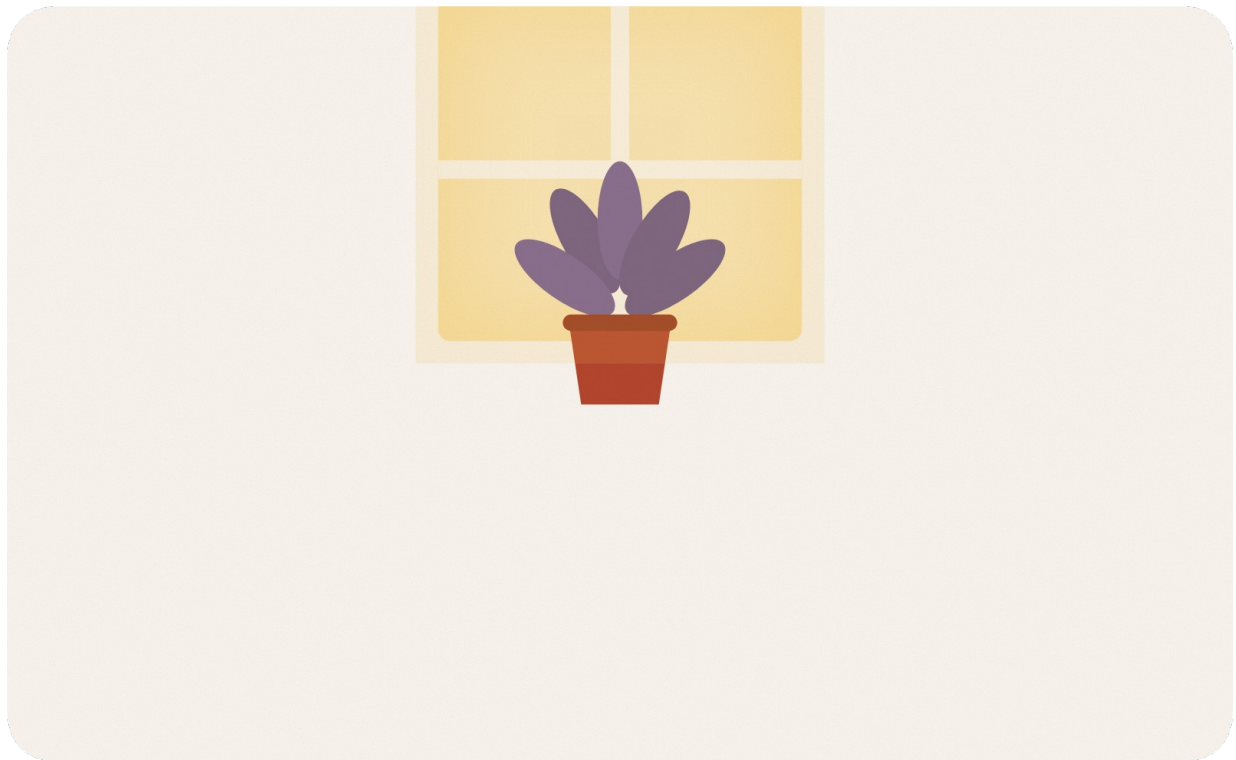
Children and young people

If there are children in the family, Macmillan and Maggie's both have information for families, including support for young carers ([Maggie's, Supporting someone with cancer, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Changes in how they are

If you notice any change in how they are, and it worries you, ask the cancer team. Use the number they've given you, in the way they've told you.

If you're worried about their health, contact their GP or NHS 111. In an emergency call 999.



06

If things change suddenly



In an emergency, call 999.

For other worries, use the 24-hour number the cancer team has given you, in the way they've told you. If you don't have one, contact the GP or NHS 111.

Keep the team's numbers by the phone where everyone in the house can find them. There's a space to write the 24-hour number at the front of this guide.

If you're worried about their health, contact their GP or NHS 111. In an emergency call 999.

07

Money and rights



Cancer can bring extra costs, and sometimes less income. You don't have to work it all out at once.

Free advice about money

Macmillan's specialist money advisers can give confidential advice on benefits and other financial support. Call the Macmillan Support Line on 0808 808 00 00 and ask for money advice, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. Macmillan also has an online tool to help you see which benefits might apply ([Macmillan, Contact us, read 3 Oct 2026](#); [Macmillan, Macmillan Grants, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Grants. Macmillan says its national grants service is no longer available. It's running local grants in some council areas, and it has information about grants and loans from other organisations ([Macmillan, Macmillan Grants](#)). In Wales, Tenovus Cancer Care offers benefits advice ([Tenovus Cancer Care, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Benefits

Our other guides have the figures and the details:

- **For them, if they're over State Pension age:** Attendance Allowance ([Coming Home, Attendance Allowance](#)).
- **For them, if they're under State Pension age:** Personal Independence Payment, or Adult Disability Payment in Scotland ([Coming Home, PIP](#)).
- **For you:** Carer's Allowance ([Coming Home, Carer's Allowance](#)).
- **Other help with money:** Council Tax, help with bills and more ([Coming Home, Money and help](#)).

You can also use the Benefits finder to see what might apply:
www.cominghomecare.app/benefits-check?ref=guide-cancer

Prescriptions

England: people with cancer can get a medical exemption certificate, which means they don't pay for NHS prescriptions. NHSBSA says it's a 5-year certificate for people having care for cancer, the effects of cancer, or the effects of their cancer care. To apply, speak to the GP or hospital doctor, who will give them an application form. The certificate usually arrives within 10 working days, and is backdated by one month. People aged 60 or over already get their prescriptions without charge and don't need to apply. A valid certificate is needed before claiming, or a penalty charge may apply ([NHSBSA, Medical exemption certificates, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Wales: people registered with a GP in Wales get their prescriptions from a pharmacist in Wales without charge ([Welsh Government, Free prescriptions, updated 18 Sep 2020](#)).

Scotland: prescriptions in Scotland are free ([NHS inform, Prescription charges and exemptions, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Northern Ireland: nidirect says all prescriptions dispensed in Northern Ireland are free for everyone, including wigs and surgical appliances, and nobody needs to apply ([nidirect, Help with health costs, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Hospital parking

England: hospitals can charge for parking. Government guidance for NHS trusts says parking should be free for those in greatest need, including disabled people and frequent outpatient attenders ([GOV.UK, NHS car parking guidance for trusts, updated 29 Mar 2022](#)). Ask the hospital's parking office or the cancer team what applies at their hospital.

Wales and Scotland: most hospital parking charges were ended in Wales in 2008 and in Scotland in 2009 ([House of Commons Library, NHS hospital car parking policies in the UK, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Northern Ireland: hospitals can charge for parking. A law to end the charges is now due to take effect no later than 12 May 2029 ([Hospital Parking Charges Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2026, legislation.gov.uk, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). Some hospitals already let people coming in regularly for radiotherapy or chemotherapy park without charge. At Belfast City Hospital, for example, the Belfast Trust says this includes a partner or relative who drives them there, and to speak to the ward sister or nurse in charge ([Belfast Trust, Car parking at Belfast City Hospital, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). Ask the Trust what applies at their hospital.

A Blue Badge may also help with parking ([GOV.UK, Apply for a Blue Badge, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

The special rules for end of life

Some benefits can be paid more quickly, and at a higher rate, under what GOV.UK calls the special rules for end of life. This is how GOV.UK defines who is eligible. It's a benefit rule, not a statement about the person you care for. GOV.UK says someone is eligible if both of these apply:

- they have an illness that gets worse over time
- their doctor or medical professional has said they might have 12 months or less to live

GOV.UK says that if a medical professional hasn't talked to them about this, they can still ask whether the professional will support a claim under the special rules. The doctor or medical professional fills in a form called SR1 ([GOV.UK, Get benefits if you're nearing the end of life, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). The same special rules apply to PIP in Northern Ireland ([nidirect, Personal Independence Payment, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). Our Attendance Allowance and PIP guides explain how to claim.

Scotland has different rules. Social Security Scotland says a registered doctor or nurse confirms the illness on a form called BASRiS, and that, unlike the UK system, it doesn't need someone to have a fixed life expectancy to apply under its fast-track process ([Social Security Scotland, Special Rules for Terminal Illness, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

If this might apply, the CNS or GP can talk it through. It's a form, and it can be a hard conversation, but it can make a real difference to money.

08

Work and carer's leave



For you

Carer's leave (England, Scotland and Wales). GOV.UK says employees can take up to one week of unpaid carer's leave every 12 months to give or arrange care for someone with a long-term care need, from their first day in a job. A "week" means the time they usually work over 7 days, and it can be taken as a whole week, single days or half days. For a day or half a day, give at least 3 days' notice. You don't have to put the request in writing or give evidence ([GOV.UK, Unpaid carer's leave, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). The rules apply in England, Wales and Scotland ([The Carer's Leave Regulations 2024, legislation.gov.uk](#)).

Time off in an emergency. Employees can take a reasonable amount of time off to deal with an emergency involving someone who depends on them for care. Employers don't have to pay for it ([GOV.UK, Time off for family and dependants, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Flexible working. All employees can ask for flexible working from their first day in a job, for example different hours, days or working from home. Employers must deal with requests in a reasonable way, and can only refuse for a good business reason ([GOV.UK, Flexible working, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Northern Ireland has different rules. nidirect says employees who've worked for their employer for at least a year can take a reasonable amount of time off in an emergency with the person they care for, and that employees who've worked

there for 26 weeks can ask for flexible working. Some employers also offer carer's leave ([nidirect, Caring for someone while working, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). Advice NI can help (see "Who to call").

It can help to talk to your manager or HR team early, and to ask whether your workplace has a policy for carers.

For them

GOV.UK says that, under the Equality Act 2010, someone automatically counts as disabled from the day they're told they have cancer ([GOV.UK, Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). The Equality Act covers England, Wales and Scotland. Macmillan has information about rights at work, sick pay and talking to employers ([Macmillan, Work and cancer, reviewed 1 Sep 2023](#)). In Northern Ireland, ask Advice NI.

09

Talking about the future



This section is gentle on purpose. You don't have to read it now. Planning ahead isn't about expecting the worst. Many families find it a relief to know that wishes are written down, whatever happens.

Power of attorney

A power of attorney lets someone they trust make decisions for them if they can't. Our power of attorney guide explains the rules in each nation ([Coming Home, Power of attorney](#)).

Recording wishes about future care

England and Wales: an advance decision to refuse treatment (ADRT) is a decision someone makes now to refuse a specific kind of medical care in the future, if they can't make or communicate the decision themselves. Everything they're refusing must be named in it. An advance decision isn't the same as an advance statement, which sets out wishes and preferences more generally ([NHS, Advance decision \(living will\), reviewed 19 Sep 2023](#)). The NHS suggests talking it through with a doctor or nurse who knows them before deciding (NHS, Advance decision).

Scotland: this is called future care planning. People can ask their doctor, nurse or care team about making a future care plan, which can be added to their health record and updated at any time ([NHS inform, Future care planning, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Northern Ireland: ask the CNS, the GP or the Health and Social Care Trust how to record wishes about future care.

End of life care

If the time comes, our guide to end of life care will help ([Coming Home, End of life care](#)). The NHS end of life care pages explain what it involves, where it can happen and how to plan ahead (NHS, End of life care).

The cancer team, the CNS or the GP can talk any of this through with you both.

10

Looking after yourself



Caring for someone with cancer can take everything you have. Looking after yourself isn't selfish. It helps you keep going, and it helps them too.

Your feelings. Macmillan says the physical and emotional demands of caring can be hard, that you might have a lot of different emotions, and that having someone to talk to might help (Macmillan, Looking after someone with cancer). You don't have to be positive all the time.

Maggie's centres. Maggie's has centres across the UK, many of them at NHS hospitals, for people with cancer and their families and friends. You don't need an appointment: just come in, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. If there isn't a centre near you, you can leave your details on the website and a cancer support specialist will call you ([Maggie's, Our centres, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).

Talking to others. Macmillan's online community is a place to talk and share experiences with other carers ([Macmillan Online Community](#)).

Small things that help:

- Ask the council for a carer's assessment (the Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland), or for an Adult Carer Support Plan in Scotland ([mygov.scot, Help if you're a carer, updated 12 Sep 2025](#)). Macmillan says any adult who cares for another adult can have a carer's assessment (Macmillan, Looking after someone with cancer).
- Tell your GP you're a carer.
- Take breaks, even short ones. Ask the council about breaks for carers.

- Talk to the Macmillan Support Line, Carers UK, or your local carers' centre.
- In Wales, Tenovus Cancer Care has a counselling service in English and Welsh, by referral from a health professional ([Tenovus Cancer Care, Counselling, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). In Northern Ireland, Cancer Focus NI offers counselling and family support ([Cancer Focus NI, Get support, read 3 Oct 2026](#)).
- Let people know what they could do to help, even small things.

If you're worried about your own health, contact your GP or NHS 111. In an emergency call 999.



11

Across the four nations



England: the NHS cancer pages, Macmillan Cancer Support, Maggie's centres, your council's adult social services, and NHS prescriptions through a medical exemption certificate.

Wales: NHS 111 Wales for health information. Tenovus Cancer Care is a Welsh cancer charity with a nurse-led Support Line in English and Welsh, benefits advice and counselling ([Tenovus Cancer Care, Nurse-led cancer support line, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). Maggie's has centres in Cardiff, Swansea and North Wales (Maggie's, Our centres). Prescriptions and most hospital parking are free.

Scotland: NHS inform for health information. Maggie's has several centres across Scotland (Maggie's, Our centres). Prescriptions and most hospital parking are free. Social Security Scotland has its own special rules for terminal illness (see section 7).

Northern Ireland: nidirect for health information and help with health costs. Cancer Focus NI has a Nurseline, counselling, family support and support groups (Cancer Focus NI, Get support). The Health and Social Care Trust does the needs assessment and the carer's assessment ([nidirect, Assessments for carers, read 3 Oct 2026](#)). Prescriptions are free. Hospital parking charges can apply (see section 7).

12

How Coming Home can help



Coming Home: Family Care is an iPhone app for families looking after someone. It's coming soon. It helps you organise. It isn't medical advice, and it can't tell you what's happening for the person you care for.

The care circle brings the family, friends and neighbours who help into one place, with shared notes, tasks and a calendar. Use it to see who's going to which appointment, and who's doing the shopping or the school run.

Everyone in the circle can join at no cost.

The family care diary helps you note questions and changes as they come up, so you have them ready for the cancer team, the GP, or a benefit form.

Every plan includes the 8 quick questions on what you might be entitled to, and a lasting power of attorney to-do list.

Care Plus (£14.99 a month or £99.99 a year) includes a 20 GB document vault, stored in the UK, for hospital letters, the care plan, the power of attorney, and documents about their wishes for future care.

To hear when Coming Home is ready, join the waitlist:

www.cominghomecare.app/?ref=guide-cancer

Built by people who know home care.

13

Who to call



This guide is guidance, not advice. For support and advice:

- **Macmillan Support Line:** 0808 808 00 00, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Money advice Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm. Online chat 8am to 7.45pm, 7 days a week (Macmillan, Contact us)
- **Cancer Research UK nurse helpline:** 0808 800 4040, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. Interpreters are available ([Cancer Research UK, Ask our nurses, read 3 Oct 2026](#))
- **Maggie's:** visit a centre, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, with no appointment, or leave your details for a call back (Maggie's, Our centres)
- **Tenovus Cancer Care Support Line (Wales):** 0808 808 1010, in English and Welsh, Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, and Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays 10am to 1pm (Tenovus Cancer Care, Nurse-led cancer support line)
- **Cancer Focus NI Nurseline:** 0800 783 3339, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 9am to 1pm ([Cancer Focus NI, read 3 Oct 2026](#))
- **Carers UK Helpline:** 0808 808 7777, Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm ([Carers UK, Helpline and other support, read 3 Oct 2026](#))
- **Age UK Advice Line:** 0800 678 1602, 8am to 7pm, every day of the year ([Age UK Advice Line, read 3 Oct 2026](#))
- **Advice NI:** 0800 915 4604 ([Advice NI, Contact, read 3 Oct 2026](#))
- **Your council's adult social services** (the Health and Social Care Trust in Northern Ireland) for a needs assessment and a carer's assessment
- **The cancer team or CNS,** on the number they've given you

If you're worried about their health, contact their GP or NHS 111. In an emergency call 999.

14

Sources

All read on 3 October 2026 unless another date is given. Dates in brackets are the page's own published, updated or reviewed date.

NHS

- NHS, Cancer (reviewed 27 May 2025): www.nhs.uk/conditions/cancer/
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- NHS, Advance decision (living will) (reviewed 19 Sep 2023): www.nhs.uk/tests-and-treatments/end-of-life-care/planning-ahead/advance-decision-to-refuse-treatment/
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- NHSBSA, Medical exemption certificates: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-nhs-prescription-costs/medical-exemption-certificates
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- NHS inform, Future care planning: www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/decisions-about-care/future-care-planning/

Official

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- Social Security Scotland, Special Rules for Terminal Illness: www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/special-rules-for-terminal-illness
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- GOV.UK, Apply for a Blue Badge: www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge
- Welsh Government, Free prescriptions (updated 18 Sep 2020): www.gov.wales/free-prescriptions
- nidirect, Help with health costs: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/help-health-costs
- GOV.UK, Unpaid carer's leave: www.gov.uk/carers-leave
- The Carer's Leave Regulations 2024: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2024/251/made
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- mygov.scot, Help if you're a carer (updated 12 Sep 2025): www.mygov.scot/help-for-carer
- nidirect, Assessments for carers: www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/assessments-carers

Charities

- Macmillan, Contact us: www.macmillan.org.uk/about-us/contact-us
- Macmillan, Supporting someone with cancer: www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/supporting-someone
- Macmillan, Looking after someone with cancer (reviewed 1 Apr 2023): www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/supporting-someone/looking-after-someone-with-cancer
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- Tenovus Cancer Care, Counselling: www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk/support-and-information/get-support/counselling
- Cancer Focus NI: cancerfocusni.org/
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- Carers UK, Helpline and other support: www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/helpline-and-other-support/
- Age UK Advice Line: www.ageuk.org.uk/services/age-uk-advice-line/
- Advice NI, Contact: www.adviceni.net/contact

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Changelog

Version	Date	What changed	Why
1.0	October 2026	First published	Information read on 3 October 2026

1.0.1. October 2026. Corrected the line about who builds Coming Home (section 12). Accuracy. No change to the advice.

The next review is due in October 2027, or straight away if a service or rule changes. The latest version is always at www.cominghomecare.app/guides/cancer



Coming Home

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This edition

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