

NHS Fife Department of Psychology

A photograph of green tree foliage is positioned on the left side of the page, partially overlapping the blue background.

Fear of illness returning

Help Yourself @ moodcafe.co.uk



Coming to the end of your treatment can bring a huge sense of relief. It is also a time when people may become more anxious about their health. On beginning to return to more normal routines and activities and thinking of plans for the future, people often become worried about their illness returning. This is a normal and understandable fear which is very common especially in the first year after treatment. For most people this fear gradually lessens over time but for some people this can continue and may become a problem. Although no-one can completely control whether or not your illness returns, it is possible to learn ways of managing the anxiety this causes. This can help people to feel able to move forward and enjoy a better quality of life.

Here are some helpful suggestions on how to cope with fear about your illness returning.

You are not alone

It is important to remember that this is a normal and understandable fear that many people recovering from illness and treatment face.

Be kind to yourself

Instead of trying to block out these worries it is often more helpful to accept these worries are present and learn ways of coping with them. Try not to criticise yourself for having these worrying thoughts. Remember that this is a normal reaction that many other people experience too. It may help to ask yourself “what would I say to someone I cared about if they were going through what I am experiencing?” This will help you to be more caring and comforting towards yourself which is what we all need when we are feeling worried and upset.

Use support

It is usually more helpful to talk about your thoughts and feelings. This can bring a sense of release for your feelings. It can also help others to understand what you are

experiencing, helping them to be in a better position to support you. Just being listened to can make a big difference and helps people to feel less burdened and less alone. You may also find joining a support group helpful. This provides the opportunity to share your experiences with others who have been through something similar. This can often help people to feel less alone with what they are going through. If you are uncomfortable with the idea of talking about your thoughts and feelings you may find it helps to write this down in a journal. For information on supportive services and helplines; see the 'A-Z of Contacts for Physical Health Conditions' under Related Sections.

Reduce stress

Remember that you will be more anxious at certain times for example when attending a review appointment at the hospital. However, it is also important to remember that other day to day stresses unrelated to your illness will also increase your anxiety. There is a section on moodcafé under the “mental health” tab with information on how to deal with stress.

Live a healthy lifestyle

It can be important to focus on living a healthy lifestyle for example eating well and exercising regularly. It is also good opportunity to make positive changes to unhealthy behaviours such as smoking or drinking too much alcohol. See our section on “Making Healthier Lifestyle Choices” on moodcafé.

It takes time to recover

Keep in mind that the end of treatment often signals the beginning of your emotional and physical recovery which may take some time. Watch out for unrealistic expectations of yourself and try not to push yourself too hard. It is often helpful to get an idea from the health professional involved in your treatment of what to expect during the end of treatment and early recovery stage.

If you are struggling help is available

If you find that you are struggling post treatment it is important to discuss this with your GP who will be able to help you or to direct you to the help that you need. The self help leaflet, 'Coping with long term conditions' may be helpful.

Visit moodcafe.co.uk
for more helpful resources

