

Steadying The What-Ifs: Support Pathways

Worry can show up in many ways. Sometimes it sits quietly in the background, and sometimes it feels loud and overwhelming. This tool helps you recognise what's on your mind and think about what kind of support would feel most helpful today.

What kind of worry is on your mind today?



I'm worried about getting cancer.



I'm worried about getting cancer again.



I'm worried about an upcoming scan or test.



I'm worried about the risk of cancer for my children and family members.



I'm worried about how cancer risk or treatment affects my identity and relationships.

How much support would feel helpful right now?



Gentle Support

For when worries are there but still manageable. Simple, self-led steps can steady your mind and build resilience over time.



Extra Support

For when worries come back more often or feel heavier. Flexible options with added support can bring reassurance and fresh perspective.



Stronger Support

For when worry starts to affect daily life. Structured, professional guidance offers steady strategies and long-term support.



- If today feels too heavy, it's okay to pause here and call these helplines to support you right away.
 - **Cancer Council Helpline** 13 11 20: confidential information and support
 - **Beyond Blue** 1300 224 636: mental health support line and online chat
 - **Lifeline** 13 11 14: 24/7 crisis support if things feel overwhelming
 - **13YARN** 13 92 76: 24/7 support line run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporters



What support might help today?

Support can shift with your needs. This quick guide offers an overview of self-led, community, and professional support options. Try what feels right today, tap in and out as you need, and return to other supports whenever they feel helpful.

Shared Strength & Connection Ways to connect and feel understood	Self-Care Tools Everyday practices that help steady the mind and body	Information & Resources Reliable information to understand and plan	Professional Help Specialist support for more structured guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read lived experiences for validation and reassurance.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Head to “Expressing the What-ifs” to see how others have named and navigated similar worries.• Join our National Online Support Group to share, listen, and feel understood.• Connect with a trained mentor through our Peer Support Program for steady, one-on-one support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore lifestyle habits that support your wellbeing like movement, nutrition, rest, and stress relief.<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Use our Health Conversation Guide to check in with yourself and find what feels most helpful.• See “Evidence-Based Guidance” for expert insights from our psychologist and physiotherapist.• Try creative outlets such as drawing, journalling, or music (see “Creative Expressions” for inspiration).• Practise Grounding & Calming Exercises to steady your body and mind.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore ICA’s Resource Centre for evidence-based information that helps you feel more informed about your risk, your options, and what’s normal for you.• Sign up for our self-breast check reminder to stay connected with your body’s normal.• Use our Health Conversation Guide or different question lists from our Resource Centre to prepare for appointments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get personalised guidance from our Inherited Cancer Support Service (genetic counsellor-led).• Book a quick GP check-in if something feels off.• Access structured mental health care through a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan or referral to a specialist.

Looking Closer at What's Weighing on You

Putting a name to your worry can make it easier to see what supports are available and which might feel most useful to you. You've already named the worry you're carrying today from the start. This section takes it further, offering a closer look at how that worry can show up and the kinds of support that might help ease it.

For some, looking closer can feel reassuring, while for others it may feel heavy. Please check in with yourself, and if now isn't the right time, it's okay to come back to this later.



I'm worried about getting cancer.



I'm worried about getting cancer again.



I'm worried about an upcoming scan or test.



I'm worried about the risk of cancer for my children and family members.



I'm worried about how cancer risk or treatment affects my identity and relationships.

"I'm worried about getting cancer."



This worry can creep in quietly or hit suddenly: maybe you carry a gene change that predisposes you to cancer and you're worrying that you already have a related cancer, or you've heard someone else's story that is triggering you, noticed a new symptom, or waiting for a test or a result. It can lead to constant body-checking, spiralling thoughts, or feeling stuck in uncertainty. You're not alone in this, and there are ways to ease the mental load.



Gentle Support

You're feeling uneasy but still managing day-to-day. You'd benefit from gentle reassurance and calming strategies.

→ Explore tips from our [Resource Hub](#), read peer stories, or try [mindfulness tools](#) to help shift focus and reduce overthinking.



Extra Support

The worry is persistent, making it hard to relax or trust your body.

→ Reach out to our [Inherited Cancer Support Service](#), speak with a genetic counsellor or GP to talk through your concerns and get clarity.



Stronger Support

The worry is overwhelming: affecting sleep, causing panic, or interfering with daily life.

→ **Seek professional support:** your GP can refer you to a Familial Cancer Clinic or specialists like a psychologist. [Helplines](#) are also available for immediate support and guidance.

"I'm worried about getting cancer again."



Even after treatment ends, the worry of cancer returning can linger. It might show up around follow-up appointments, when you feel a new symptom, or even out of the blue. This worry can lead to hyper-awareness of your body, difficulty trusting your health, your healthcare specialists and a sense of an inevitable negative event. It's a common and valid experience, and there are ways to feel more supported.



Gentle Support

You're feeling uneasy but still managing day-to-day. You'd benefit from gentle reminders and lifestyle strategies that help you feel more in control.

→ Explore [lived experience insights](#), [healthy lifestyle tips](#), and [mindfulness tools](#) to help build confidence and calm.



Extra Support

The worry is more persistent, making it hard to relax, sleep, or focus.

→ Connect with the [Inherited Cancer Support Service](#), talk to your GP or genetic counsellor, or join our [peer support program](#) to share your concerns and get reassurance.



Stronger Support

The worry is intense, affecting your mood, relationships, or daily functioning.

→ Seek professional support: your GP can refer you to a psychologist or specialist. [Helplines](#) are also available for immediate emotional support.

"I'm worried about an upcoming scan or test."



The build-up to scans or tests, and then waiting for results, can be one of the hardest parts.

Many people call this "scanxiety": the heightened anxiety and stress linked to upcoming scans, tests, and the period of waiting for results. Scanxiety is common both for people who know they are at higher risk of developing cancer and for those who have experienced cancer before. For people at risk, scans can bring fears of the unknown or the possibility of a first diagnosis. For those who have already been through cancer, the process can trigger memories of past treatments or worries about recurrence.

The uncertainty, the "what ifs," and the worry of bad news can feel overwhelming. You might find yourself replaying scenarios, re-living previous negative experiences, checking your body for signs, or struggling to focus on anything else. This kind of worry is valid, and support is available.



Gentle Support

You're feeling uneasy but still managing day-to-day.

→ Try the [Scanxiety Survival Toolkit](#) that includes tips like breathing exercises or distraction strategies to help you stay grounded.



Extra Support

The worry is lingering, making it hard to concentrate or sleep.

→ Consider talking to someone through the [Peer Support Program](#) or check in with your GP for tailored advice and reassurance.



Stronger Support

The anxiety is intense, affecting your mood, relationships, or ability to function.

→ Reach out for professional support: your GP can refer you to a psychologist or mental health specialist. You can also contact [helplines](#) for immediate support.

"I'm worried about the risk of cancer for my children and family members."



It's very common to worry about how your own diagnosis or family history might affect the people you love. With inherited cancer predisposition, there can be concerns that children or other biological relatives may have also inherited the same genetic change. This can raise worries about them developing cancer in the future, or about the impact of genetic testing and medical screening on their lives.

Some people describe feeling guilty about the possibility of passing on a genetic risk, even though this is something no one can control. Deciding if, when, and how to share this information with family can feel overwhelming. You may also worry about how relatives will cope with this knowledge or how it may affect their plans for the future.

For those thinking about having children, it's natural to have questions about reproductive options: such as prenatal diagnostic testing, IVF with preimplantation genetic testing, the use of donor gametes, or adoption, as ways to prevent passing on a predisposition.

These are complex and very personal issues. Feeling anxious, conflicted, or uncertain about them is valid, and support is available to help you and your family navigate these decisions.



Gentle Support

You're feeling uneasy but still managing day-to-day.

→ Explore our information on [genetic risk](#), talk with a genetic counsellor, or browse [family communication tips](#).



Extra Support

The worry feels persistent. You're unsure how to share information or what steps relatives should take.

→ Connect with the [Inherited Cancer Support Service](#) or book a session with a genetic counsellor to discuss family implications and next steps.



Stronger Support

The worry is overwhelming, causing high stress, guilt, or major conflict in the family.

→ Seek professional support from your GP, genetic counsellor, a psychologist, or family counsellor. [Helplines](#) are also available for immediate emotional support.

"I'm worried about how cancer risk or treatment affects my identity and relationships."



Living with cancer or an inherited cancer risk can change how you see yourself and how you connect with others. You may feel different in your body, your role, or your relationships, and wonder how to rebuild confidence and closeness. Some people feel pressure to stay strong for loved ones, or worry about being a burden, while others struggle with guilt about letting family down.

Risk-reducing or cancer treatments can also affect your sense of identity, including sexuality, fertility, and body image. These changes may bring challenges around intimacy, self-confidence, and how you express yourself in relationships.

These worries can ebb and flow over time. Support is available to help you talk through these feelings, reconnect with yourself, and strengthen your sense of confidence and connection with others.



Gentle Support

You're feeling uneasy but still managing day-to-day.

→ Explore [peer stories](#), journaling or creative outlets, and self-compassion resources (e.g. [Relationships, Intimacy & Sex](#), [Body Acceptance](#))



Extra Support

The worry feels heavier, impacting your confidence, sexuality, or sense of connection.

→ Reach out to our [Peer Support Program](#), [Inherited Cancer Support Service](#), or talk to your GP about a referral to a counsellor specialising in cancer survivorship.



Stronger Support

The worry is intense, seriously affecting your mood, relationships, or ability to cope.

→ Professional support is recommended. Talk to your GP about psychology referrals, relationship counselling, or survivorship specialists.

Visit our website for more information:

inheritedcancers.org.au