

Tips for managing cancer treatment when you have dementia or memory problems.



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FUNDED BY
NIHR | National Institute
for Health Research



Tips for managing cancer treatment

Attending hospital for cancer treatment can be demanding, especially if you have dementia or memory problems. The follow tips come from a study that looked at the experiences of people with dementia when they attended hospital for cancer treatment and care.

This leaflet provides evidence-based practical advice and tips to help someone with dementia or memory problems through cancer treatment and care.

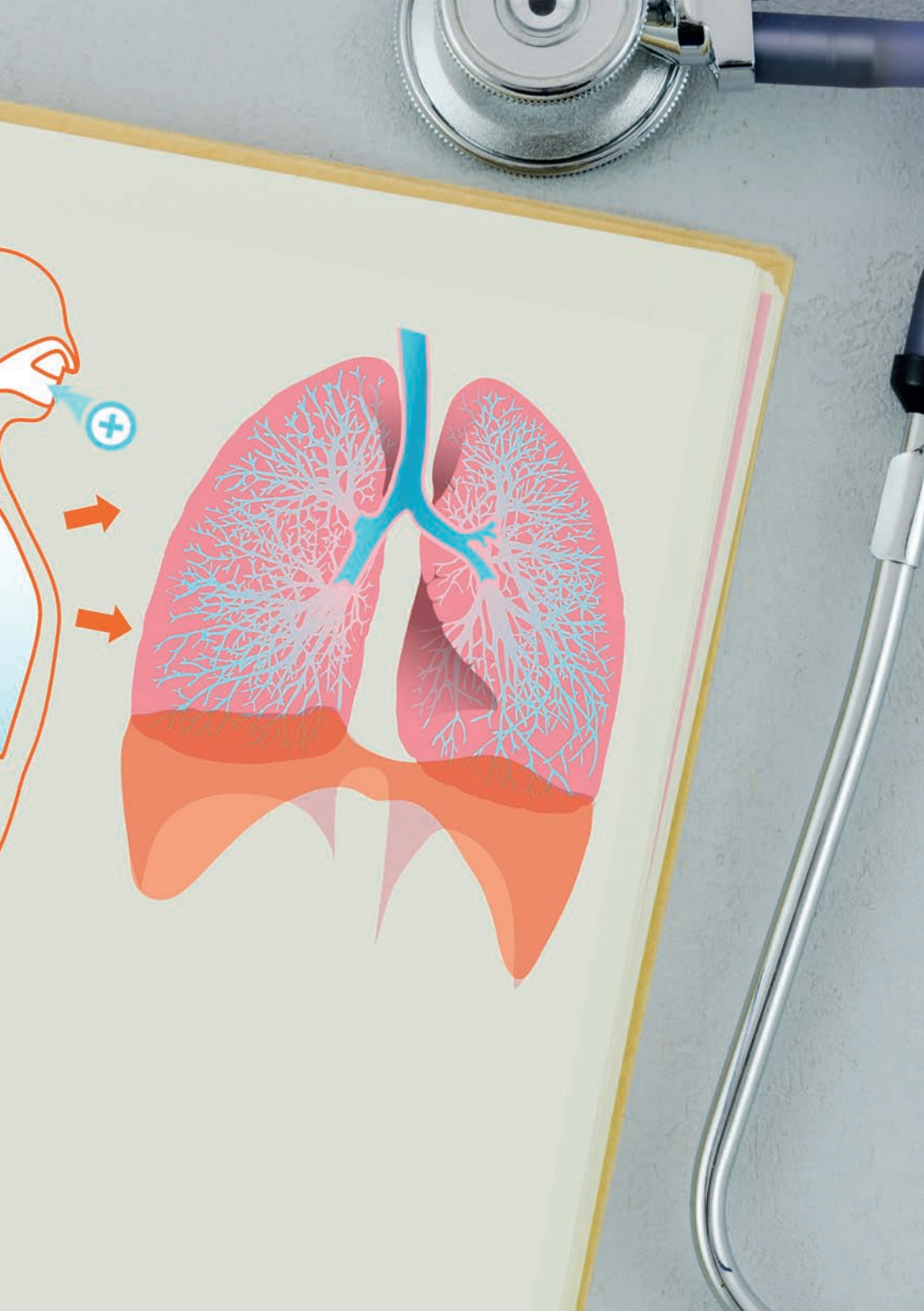


Make sure people know you have dementia

Information about your dementia may not be clearly recorded in hospital records. Make sure you tell people you have dementia or memory problems so they can consider it when planning your treatment and care.

Let people know what helps

Your doctors and nurses will find it help to know how having dementia affects you. It can be helpful to have this written down so you can give them a copy.



Ask for things to be explained so you understand

Sometimes doctors, nurses and other healthcare staff may explain things in a way that you find difficult to understand. If this is the case ask for things to be explained again, or in a different way.

Ask for written information to take away

Ask your doctor or nurse for written information specific to you and your cancer diagnosis and treatment options, so you can take it away to think about and discuss. You could ask them to draw pictures and diagrams to help explain things.



Think about treatment options carefully

Ask your doctor or nurse about how having dementia might affect you during different treatments. You will need to think about possible side effects such as tiredness. Other treatments might need you to visit hospital daily for several weeks and lie very still during treatment, or to have one or more nights staying in hospital.

Take the time you need to make the decision that is right for you. You can ask the doctor or nurse for more time to talk to family about your options or to think about what you wish to do.



Think about what support might help

You should think about what might help you during treatment and ask if the hospital can provide this. For example:

- You could ask to visit the department and look at the equipment before treatment starts.
- You may find it helpful if someone familiar, such as a family member, stays with you in the treatment room for as long as possible.
- You could ask for your favourite music to be played during treatment to help you relax.

You can also see if the hospital can be flexible with appointments and arrangements for getting to the hospital.

For example,

- If you find your memory more problematic early in the morning ask if you can have a late morning or afternoon appointment.
- It may be possible to have free parking or to reserve a space close to the entrance
- You could ask if it is possible to conduct follow-up appointments by telephone once your treatment and aftercare is complete.



Support from family and friends

People with cancer and dementia find support from family and friends is really important to help them through cancer treatment.

You may find it helpful to have someone attend all your appointments with you.

You can ask for a copy of appointment and results letters to go to a family member or friend as well as you, if you might struggle to remember when they are.

If you use patient transport services to attend appointments, you may be able to travel on that with a relative or friend to support you, as long as a space is pre-booked for you both.

Keep things familiar

It can help with treatment if things become familiar, so ask if you can see the same staff and use the same treatment rooms each appointment where possible.

This leaflet is based on research from The Centre for Dementia Research, Leeds Beckett University.

It was funded by the National Institute for Health Research, Research for Patient Benefit Programme (RfPB) (project reference PB-PG-0816-20015).

The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NIHR or the Department of Health and Social Care.



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