

# 10 Ways to Take Control of Your Cancer Recovery

## WELCOME






*Hi, I'm Sally*

In 2018 I became a cancer patient after an early bowel cancer diagnosis. Despite being a nurse of over 18 years at the time of my diagnosis, I found navigating my own healthcare journey complex, and clear and concise information was difficult to find.

After my journey of surgical treatment and a plethora of cancer-related complications, I found myself living an emotional rollercoaster. Yet, I discovered my body, mind, and soul to be a place of strength and determination that I didn't know existed.

Navigating illness and recovery while caring for two young boys, maintaining a relationship, managing chronic symptoms, changes in friendship circles, processing the "why me", 'scanxiety', post-cancer food phobias, survivor guilt, results PTSD, end-of-life fears, forgiveness, body distrust, altered body image, and returning to work have all been lengthy and enlightening roads to travel.

### MANY LESSONS HAVE BEEN LEARNED ALONG THE WAY:

	Modern medicine has a strong focus on physical recovery, with limited emphasis on emotional recovery. The importance of mental health is often overlooked in the recovery phase.
	Physical and mental health are often treated as two separate entities, instead of an integrated whole.
	A healthy mindset is the key to recovery.
	There is a misconception that once a person returns home from the hospital, or when treatment ends, that they are 'well again'.
	The recovery work begins once you return home.



A lot of cancer resources and funding is targeted at older adults.



There is a gap in education for younger adults regarding nutrition, fertility preservation, cancer fog, early menopause, intimacy, relationship breakdowns, and grief.



There is a place for both modern and holistic medicine- neither has all of the answers.

Throughout my own cancer experience, I found the online world of patient information and resources overwhelming, and I was left with many unanswered questions. So, today I create resources and educational material to support patients to navigate their cancer recovery with greater ease.

I hope that you enjoy this resource.

*Sally, the Awakened Mamma*

# Make sure you have a Care plan

## **1. Every cancer patient should have a care plan from their treating specialist.**

Your care plan will be a booklet that outlines: your cancer type, a summary of your treatment, potential treatment side-effects, symptoms to be aware of, your follow-up plan(s), well-being advice, and supportive care resources. [myCareplan](#) is a great free care plan that you can complete and download if you don't already have one. Use your care plan as a guide for your treatment plan. Take notes and record any questions for your specialists and health care team.

Prioritise your emotional health and  
create more personal capacity

## *2. Give yourself permission to focus on you.*

I am sure that you would agree that there is no greater asset than your health. Now is the time to focus on you and prioritise your physical health, your emotional health, your mental health, and what matters most to you.

This may mean opting out of unnecessary commitments, becoming comfortable with saying “no”, taking time off work, or negotiating flexible work arrangements. Where possible remove all unnecessary stressors from your life to create more capacity to support your recovery and wellbeing after cancer.

## *3. Say “Yes” to more ease.*

An easy way to do this is to write a list of all tasks and commitments that can be done by someone else and begin to delegate. To do this, find some quiet time, map out all your tasks for the week ahead, and note all activities that only you can do. You will be pleasantly surprised at just how little you physically need to do yourself. This is a great way to audit your time and a valuable process to revisit regularly. It will allow you the additional time that you need to focus on yourself, your recovery, and your loved ones.

Practice asking yourself- “Is there an easier way to do this?”. This could be as simple as putting your bills on direct debit, scheduling regular online grocery shopping, or buying yourself a pill box to organise your daily medicines and vitamins.

## *4. Become the gatekeeper of your energy.*

This goes together with points 2 and 3 above. Many clients that reach out to me have a long history of over-giving, working hard, not prioritising self-care, and ‘running on empty’. Now is a great time to put boundaries in place to protect your energy. This takes practice and a great way to begin is to take notice of situations, activities and people that leave you feeling drained. Awareness is the first step, from here you can begin to make changes to prioritise your well-being and ensure that you protect your energy.

## *5. Drop all guilt, what if's, should haves, could haves, I wish I had ...*

These thoughts are not supporting you in your recovery. When you find yourself ruminating on negative thoughts or being unkind to yourself, a great practice is to ask yourself “Is this kind, is this helpful”? If the answer is no, ask yourself “what is one step I can take to support myself right now”? This could be phoning a trusted friend to talk through your concerns, writing down your thoughts to reduce your mental load, booking in with a cancer psychologist, going for a walk in nature, or watching a funny movie. One of my favourite quotes is “only look back to see how far you’ve come”.

## *6. Give yourself the same kindness and compassion that you would give to your best friend.*

We are often harder on ourselves than our loved ones.

## 7. Write down the mantra “That’s not my story.”

This is one of my favourite tools. I use this mantra when I am triggered by a sad cancer story. If I find that I am triggered by a story that reminds me of my own diagnosis or prompts me to become fearful about my future- I tell myself “That’s not my story”. This one will take practice and it is well worth the effort.

## 8. Book in early with a Cancer Psychologist or Counsellor

A Cancer Psychologist or Counsellor is an important member of your healthcare team. As humans, we are not designed to navigate a major life challenge alone. A specialist Psychologist or Counsellor can support you with resources and strategies to navigate your cancer experience at key times including adjusting to a diagnosis, changes in treatment regimes, managing fear of recurrence, managing side effects, support to manage relationship strain, parental guilt, returning to work or difficult decision making in treatment.

The best part is that they are paid to focus solely on you for an hour! You can be open and honest and not worry about burdening a loved one.



# Prioritise your Physical Health

Nutrition and Exercise are **just** two important areas of health that need focus after a cancer diagnosis.

## 9. Prioritise your nutrition.

Many patients want to prioritise their nutrition after a cancer diagnosis. It is a great way to take back some control of your health after cancer. The challenge is that the online cancer nutrition space is cluttered and confusing with conflicting views and opinions, many of which are not evidence-based.

In simple terms, all of us will benefit from following the JERF principle - 'just eat real food' that has come from the farm or paddock. Auditing your fridge and pantry to remove as much of the processed products as possible, removing trans fats, and filling your diet with wholefoods is the easiest way to begin. Take small steps, any small improvement is still an improvement and this approach is easier to maintain than large changes made all at once.

If you can afford to link in with a cancer dietitian or nutritionist, it will be money well spent. Patients who will benefit from working with an expert include those undergoing major surgery, lengthy treatment regimes, patients with unexplained weight loss, patients with muscle wasting, patients with food intolerances or allergies, those with bowel or stomach dysfunction, and patients wanting support to lose weight after treatment.

Your treating team will be able to refer you to an expert dietitian or nutritionist, which may even be free of charge through a public hospital or covered by insurance. I recommend the book '[Can Food Be Medicine Against Cancer](#)', by Australia's Dr David Wilkinson. It is evidence-based and an easy read. I cover nutrition in more detail in my blog post '[Optimising your nutrition - an easier cancer recovery](#)'.

## 10. Exercise is medicine for cancer.

If you only take one tip from this resource, please let it be that *exercise is medicine for cancer*.

The benefits of exercise in cancer are well researched - from an improvement in treatment response, to improved surgical outcomes, reduction in common cancer treatment side effects, improved mental health, reduction in cancer recurrence, and improved overall quality of life. The evidence is clear - we all benefit from exercise.

To get started with a structured program, you can link in with an exercise physiologist or specialist fitness trainer. A tailored, individualised program or group classes are great if you need specialised support, would benefit from the accountability or you don't know where to begin. Your treating medical team or leading cancer charity may also be able to link you in to an in-person or online program. I cover exercise in more detail in my blog post '[Exercise and a better cancer recovery](#)'.

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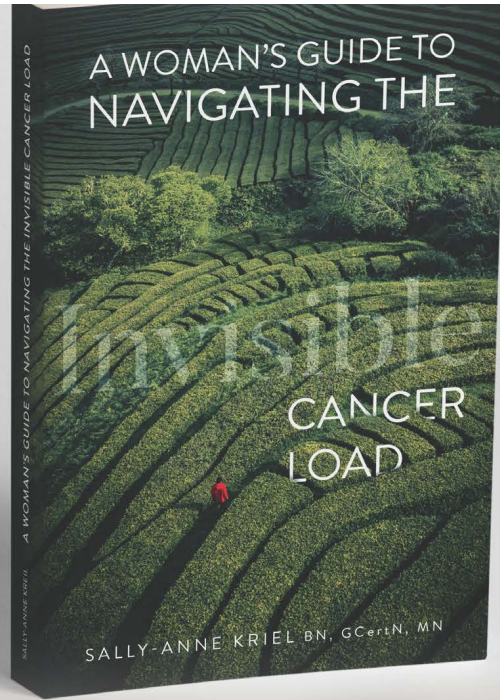
If you would like more information on **what** and **how** to prioritise during your cancer recovery for more ease, head over to my book '[A Woman's Guide to Navigating the Invisible Load](#)' for more details





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NOW



by SALLY-ANNE KRIEL  
BN, GCertN, MN



*"Having the unique experience of being both clinician and patient, Sally-Anne is able to weave together not only her personal cancer journey but also her professional knowledge. It is this multifaceted perspective that has allowed her to create such an amazing resource to help other cancer patients on their journey."*

DR EMILY AMOS,  
General Practitioner, Mindfulness Meditation Teacher

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To access more free resources head over to my [Resource page](#) and [Blog](#).





*Awakened Mama Wellness*