

## Treatment and Well-being

**As the nurse unit manager of day oncology at Melbourne's Austin Health Centre, Tina Griffiths helps patients going through cancer treatment. Here, she discusses help for the accompanying physical and emotional changes.**

“When someone begins cancer treatment there are first of all short-term physical changes. Surgery such as a mastectomy may change a woman's perception of her body image. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy also bring short-term changes, one of the most common being loss of your hair, eyebrows or eyelashes. Those are very public changes and they affect your way of thinking. You become a ‘cancer patient.’

“Less obvious changes like fatigue may have a significant impact on you psychologically, and on your relationships with your partner, friends and colleagues.

“When you get a cancer diagnosis your sense of control goes out the window. Information provides control and a sense of empowerment. Patients may not have control over what happens with their cancer but you can contribute to your own well being. The way you eat and drink can impact how you feel, and you may need to cut back on work and home responsibilities. The way you dress or apply makeup can make a difference too. A program called Look Good, Feel Better, which is supported by the beauty industry, runs workshops and teaches people about skin care, wigs, scarves and ways to dress that can help them to look better.

“People cope psychologically in all kinds of ways. There are counseling programs and support groups, but not everyone will want them. People's experience with cancer is individual. Those who cope better are the ones who are able to reframe their way of thinking about what's happening to them, and who have an attitude of “Yes, I can help myself.”