

# Case Study

## Gillian's challenge around maintaining good health

When Gillian first came to me for coaching, she was two years post-breast cancer treatment. Despite successfully returning to her career and maintaining her family life, she was struggling significantly with her health and emotional wellbeing. During our initial sessions, it became clear that she had been using food and alcohol as coping mechanisms to deal with the emotional aftermath of her cancer experience, while physical activity had fallen completely by the wayside.

### Exploration

In our early conversations, we focused on understanding how the cancer experience had impacted her relationship with her body and health. I asked Gillian, "When you think about your relationship with your body now, compared to before cancer, what has changed the most?"

This question opened up an emotional discussion about feeling betrayed by her body and her struggle to trust it again. She spoke about living in "survival mode" since her diagnosis, focusing solely on getting through each day rather than truly living.

Through our sessions, it became clear to Gillian that her current behaviours – comfort eating, drinking to numb difficult emotions, and avoiding physical activity – were serving as protective mechanisms, albeit unhealthy ones. To help her picture a different future, we used the Values Discovery technique. When asked

"What would being healthy mean to you beyond the physical aspects?"

Gillian said what she desired was to be present and energetic for her teenage daughters and to return to her passion for gardening.

### Self limiting beliefs

As we worked together, several limiting beliefs emerged that were holding Gillian back from prioritising her health. Using my Limiting Beliefs tool, we uncovered deep-seated thoughts about not deserving to prioritise herself and fears that any effort toward health might be pointless if the cancer returned. One particularly powerful coaching question –

"How might your life be different if you believed you were worthy of excellent health right now?"

helped shift her perspective from viewing self-care as selfish to seeing it as essential for both herself and her family.

With this new understanding, we developed a gentle, progressive approach to rebuilding her health. Rather than overwhelming Gillian with dramatic lifestyle changes, we focused on small, manageable steps. She began by simply keeping a food journal without judgment and introducing five minutes of morning stretching into her routine. These small successes built her confidence and motivation.

### **Building up gradually**

As Gillian grew more comfortable with these changes, we gradually expanded her healthy habits. She started replacing one alcoholic drink each evening with herbal tea and incorporated short daily walks. The key to success was ensuring each new step felt achievable – I would often ask, "On a scale of 1–10, how confident do you feel about achieving this?" If the answer wasn't at least an 8, we would modify the goal until it felt both challenging and attainable.

### **Finding support**

Support played a crucial role in Gillian's transformation. We identified key support systems, including her family, a cancer survivors' support group, and her breast care nurse. Her daughters became involved in meal planning and preparation, turning healthy eating into a family activity rather than a solitary challenge.

Over three months, Gillian's progress was remarkable. She developed a consistent morning movement routine and significantly reduced her alcohol consumption. More importantly, she began to view her health journey as an act of self-care rather than punishment. She started enjoying cooking nutritious meals with her daughters and found that regular physical activity helped manage her emotional wellbeing better than her previous coping mechanisms.

Kirstie my health has improved drastically since our sessions! I was worried at the beginning that you might judge me for how little I was focusing on my health especially considering I had had cancer, but you showed me empathy and understanding. I had been setting myself big goals of losing 3 stone or running 5k's but you taught me that I need to keep my goals small and achievable, and that's meant I have actually been able to keep up with them instead of giving up like I have in the past. It's still a work in progress but I promise I will be more gentle with myself than I was and will make I sure I look for support when needed.