

CANCER IN THE WORKPLACE

Employee Tip Sheet

For employees diagnosed with cancer, in treatment or beyond

Finding out you have cancer can bring about many changes for you and your loved ones. As you navigate diagnosis and treatment, you also may think about how cancer could impact your work. Some people with cancer can go to work and continue with their routine during treatment. Others find that they need more rest or don't feel well enough to do as much.

People facing cancer have many sources of support. Some are listed at the end of this tip sheet. The tip sheet also lists workplace resources, policies and benefits available to you.



SHARING THE NEWS

Once you find out you have cancer, you may feel unsure about how to share the news with people at work. Human resources and your direct supervisor can help you understand important benefits available to people with cancer, so it may be helpful to talk to them first. They will not share any information with other employees without your permission. How open you are with your co-workers about your cancer is a personal decision.

Here are some issues to think about to help you decide what you want to share with your co-workers:

- **Are your co-workers part of your support system?** Everyone, no matter how emotionally strong they are, can use support. If you share the news with your co-workers, they may ask how they can help and be a strong source of support and encouragement for you during and after treatment.
- **What is your work environment like?** Do you work in a highly competitive, fast-paced work environment? If so, you might want to confide in only a few people you know well.
- **Do you feel ready to handle a range of reactions from co-workers?** Some of your co-workers will react to your cancer diagnosis with understanding and support. Others may feel uncomfortable

for a range of reasons: For example, they may be reminded of a loved one's time with cancer, or they may resent taking on extra work on your treatment days. Still others may ask intrusive questions about your health and treatment or react awkwardly because of their own fear or discomfort. Having a plan about what and how much you want to share can help you feel more comfortable in these situations.



DURING TREATMENT

Whether you can continue working during cancer treatment depends on the type of treatment you are getting, the stage of your cancer, your overall health, and the kind of work you do. Policies, resources and benefits are in place to help support the choices you make. Your supervisor and Human Resources (HR) department can provide details about leave, health insurance coverage and workplace accommodations. Here is an overview of benefits that may be available to you:

- **Flexible work schedule:** You may need time off to go to doctor's appointments and receive treatments. Talk to your supervisor and HR about ways to adjust your schedule, such as by working from home or moving to a part-time schedule.



- **Leave of absence:** Whether you plan to continue working or take time off, different types of leave can support your needs. Some examples include: paid time off (PTO), sick leave, continuous or intermittent family medical leave (FMLA), and short-term disability.
- **Health insurance coverage:** You may have questions about how much of your cancer treatment your health insurance covers. Talk to your HR/benefits manager about limiting out-of-pocket expenses and finding doctors who specialize in the type of cancer you have. When you experience side effects from treatment, be sure to talk to your health care team about therapies to help resolve these issues.
- **Accommodations:** Your needs may change as you undergo treatment. Your employer may be able to help you be successful at work, even during difficult times. HR can discuss options available to you. You may be able to work shorter days or take more time off.
- **Well-being options:** Receiving a cancer diagnosis and undergoing treatment can be stressful. Find out if your employer offers well-being programs that can help you cope with stress and build resilience.
- **Modified responsibilities:** Once active treatment is over, you may need to continue a part-time work schedule or work from home before returning to a full-time schedule. Side effects may slow you down. If that happens, you may need more time to complete certain tasks.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

American Cancer Society:

www.cancer.org or 1-800-227-2345

National Business Group on Health:

www.businessgrouphealth.org or 202-558-3000

The Jobs Accommodations Network (JAN):

<http://askjan.org/>

**National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship
(Cancer Survival Toolbox):**

<https://www.canceradvocacy.org/resources/cancer-survival-toolbox/>



AFTER TREATMENT

After treatment ends, you may still need time off for follow-up appointments or need other modifications to your schedule.

Work with your HR team and/or supervisor to allow for:

- **Schedule flexibility:** Many people with cancer will continue to see their doctors to stay healthy. Some people will still need regular treatments to keep their cancer from coming back. Talk with your supervisor about how often you will need time off for appointments and treatments.
- **Treatment for side effects:** Some cancer survivors experience long-term or late physical effects of their treatment. If you have side effects, talk with your care team about ways to manage them or referrals to specialists who can help. Examples include:
 - Fatigue
 - Memory loss or difficulty concentrating
 - Numbness or tingling due to nerve damage
 - Heart problems or lung problems

