



**cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345**

## Working During Cancer Treatment

Whether you can work during cancer treatment depends on:

- The type of treatment you are getting
- The stage of your cancer
- Your overall health
- The kind of work you do

Talk to your health care provider about your plans to work or not work. Your health care provider will best be able to advise you on your specific treatment plan and possible side effects that might affect your ability to work. Your health care provider may also want you to limit some of your activities.

Some people are able to keep working while they're getting cancer treatment. Some people work their usual full-time schedules. Some work the same schedules under special conditions (accommodations), like being closer to the office bathroom so it's easier to deal with side effects. Others need a less demanding schedule, like taking extra days off or even working part time for a while.

The willingness and ability of your workplace to accommodate any special needs you might have will affect your success at working during treatment. Talk with your employer about what you might need at this time.

Under federal and state laws, some employers may be required to let you work a flexible schedule to meet your treatment needs. You can find out more from your state's Department of Labor. Visit their website ([www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/state/contacts](http://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/state/contacts)<sup>1</sup>) to find your state office. Also see [Americans With Disabilities Act: Information for People with Cancer](#)<sup>2</sup> and the [Family and Medical Leave Act](#)<sup>3</sup>. You can call us to learn more: 1-800-227-2345.

## Telling your supervisor

If you do decide to talk about your cancer, have a meeting with your supervisor and explain you want to continue to work while you are getting treatment. Be honest about your treatment and the hours away from work it may require. But remember, your situation might change and you can only make estimations at this time. Still, if you tell your supervisor and co-workers, you can work together to set realistic expectations. Keep in mind that what you tell your boss is confidential information – it will not be shared unless you say it is ok to do so.

## Telling your co-workers

How open you are with your co-workers about your cancer is a personal decision. Before talking about your cancer with co-workers, you might want to talk to your health care provider about how your illness and treatment plan may affect your job/career. Learn as much as you can from your health care team about side effects that you may experience and how you can manage them at work. Based on your relationship with your co-workers, you can decide if you want to share anything, or limit how much you would like to share. Try not to feel pressured to share or explain things. Only you can decide what works best for you and your situation.

Some of your co-workers may react to your cancer diagnosis and absences with understanding and offers to help. Others may feel uncomfortable around you. Some people may be reminded of a loved one's time with cancer. Some co-workers may resent that they had to take on extra duties on days that you need to be off. Others may ask intrusive questions about your health and treatment, or they might avoid you. For more on how to deal with those around you, you may want to read [Telling Others About Your Cancer](#)<sup>4</sup>. It also helps to think ahead about how you will handle other people's reactions, and have a plan for what and how much you want to share.

## Tips for working while you are getting treatment

It's important to figure out how you will continue to work while you are being treated for cancer. These tips might help you better manage your time and work:

- If you find that you need time to recover after your treatment, try to plan your treatments around your needs. For example, late in the day or right before the weekend to allow time to recover.
- Explore options like working from home some days. This might help you feel less tired and allow you to take care of yourself more easily if you have problems.

- Getting help at home can mean more energy for work. Certain daily chores may be divided among friends and family members.
- You may let co-workers know about your situation if you feel this is right for you. They can be great sources of support. They may even be able to help you come up with ways to better manage your work during this time.
- Keep your supervisor and if applicable, your co-workers up to date on how well your schedule or other changes are working for you.
- Make a log of your usual work schedule and duties. Refer to it when you set up flex-time, shifted duties, or time off.
- Make a detailed list of job duties so you can direct others in handling things when you're out of the office.
- If co-workers helped with some of your responsibilities while you were absent, let them know you are thankful for their help and support.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it. This ensures you are taking the best care of yourself and may show your supervisors and co-workers that you're interested in the best outcome of your job responsibilities.

## Legal protections for working people with cancer

You have the same rights as anyone else in the workplace and should be given equal opportunities, regardless of whether or not you tell people at work about your cancer. Hiring, promotion, and how you are treated in the workplace should depend entirely on your abilities and qualifications. As long as you are able to fulfill your job duties, you can't legally be fired for being sick. You also shouldn't have to accept a position you never would have considered before your illness.

Many people with job problems related to cancer are protected by federal laws like the [Rehabilitation Act](#)<sup>5</sup> and the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#)<sup>6</sup> (ADA). Some people also benefit from the [Family and Medical Leave Act](#)<sup>7</sup> (FMLA) This law lets many people with serious illnesses take reasonable unpaid leave to get medical care or manage their symptoms. Talk to someone in your human resources department or another workplace expert to find out what your options are.

## Reasonable accommodations at work

Employers are not required to lower standards in order to accommodate an employee, nor must they provide personal-use items like glasses or hearing aids. But an employer must accommodate a qualified applicant or employee with a disability unless the

employer can show doing so would be an undue hardship. Examples of reasonable accommodations for cancer patients may include, but are not limited to:

- Providing or modifying equipment or devices
- Restructuring a job
- Offering part-time or modified work schedules, such as permission to work from home if possible
- Offering reasonable breaks for rest or to take medications
- Adjusting office temperature
- Reassigning an employee to a vacant position or assigning the employee different tasks if the employee is no longer able to perform his or her current job
- Adjusting or modifying tests, training materials, or policies
- Providing readers and/or interpreters
- Making the workplace readily accessible to and usable by people with disabilities
- A vocational rehabilitation counselor can help with some of your job-related legal questions, but you may also want to look into laws that affect you and how you deal with any problems that may come up. Some cancer treatment centers offer referrals to vocational rehab counselors, so ask your health care team. Your health care team may also have tools or people that can help you.

To find out more about job accommodations and employment of people with limitations, contact the [Job Accommodation Network](#)<sup>8</sup> at 1-800-526-7234. They can talk with you about the requirements of the ADA or the Rehabilitation Act, if either one applies to you.

## **Workplace discrimination against people with cancer**

Even though the public's understanding of cancer is getting better, sometimes prejudices and fears are found in the workplace. You may talk with your Human Resources Department if you are worried you might face work discrimination issues. If your workplace has a union, its officials can be good sources of information about illnesses and the workplace.

If you believe you have been discriminated against, you should first learn as much as possible about how your company has handled grievance issues in the past. It might help you avoid a stressful situation that could be draining both financially and physically.

Keep notes of your contacts with office personnel, including the names of the people you spoke to, the date and place you spoke, and the information you received. It's also

a good idea to keep copies of your job performance evaluations and any other written information about your work. These can be very helpful if problems come up later.

### **If you want to file a discrimination complaint**

If you think you have been discriminated against at work on the basis of disability, you can file a complaint with the United States [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#)<sup>9</sup> (EEOC). You must do this within 180 days of when you think the discrimination occurred (although some states or local laws allow you to take up to 300 days). For more specific information about ADA requirements affecting employment, contact the EEOC at 1-800-669-4000 or 1-800-669-6820 (TTY).

### **Disability insurance for people with cancer**

Sometimes, even with good planning and extra time off, you might find that it's still too much to keep working during cancer treatment. If you find that you can't keep up with the demands of your job while getting treatment, talk to your supervisor. Explain that you want to keep working, but you need to take some time away from work.

Talk to someone from your human resources department to find out if you qualify for short-term or long-term disability insurance benefits at your job and how you can apply for them. In general, short-term disability pays you some portion of your income for the first few weeks to months you are unable to work. If you must be out longer, some employers also carry long-term disability insurance, which usually starts after a few months of disability. Different employers and insurance companies have different definitions of short-term and long-term disability. You must meet the insurance company's definition of disability to get this income. If your employer benefits don't include disability insurance, ask about [Supplemental Security Income](#)<sup>10</sup> or [Social Security Disability Insurance](#)<sup>11</sup>.

Talk with your health care provider about how your treatment and symptoms are affecting your work to decide whether or when you should think about taking time off. Your health care provider can help you fill out part of the disability application.

Keep in mind that it might be a disadvantage to put off going on short-term disability. Some people have had to go to great lengths to prove that they can't do their job after they've spent weeks forcing themselves to go to work. Don't wait until your work performance suffers before you decide to take time away from work. Always keep your supervisor updated and talk with your health care provider to make the best decision for yourself.

## Hyperlinks

1. [www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/state/contacts](http://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/state/contacts)
2. [www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/health-insurance-laws/americans-with-disabilities-act.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/health-insurance-laws/americans-with-disabilities-act.html)
3. [www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/health-insurance-laws/family-and-medical-leave-act.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/health-insurance-laws/family-and-medical-leave-act.html)
4. [www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/telling-others-about-your-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/telling-others-about-your-cancer.html)
5. <http://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm#anchor65610>
6. [www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/health-insurance-laws/americans-with-disabilities-act.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/health-insurance-laws/americans-with-disabilities-act.html)
7. [www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/health-insurance-laws/family-and-medical-leave-act.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/health-insurance-laws/family-and-medical-leave-act.html)
8. [askjan.org](http://askjan.org)
9. [www.eeoc.gov/](http://www.eeoc.gov/)
10. [www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/government-funded-programs/supplemental-security-income-for-people-with-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/government-funded-programs/supplemental-security-income-for-people-with-cancer.html)
11. [www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/government-funded-programs/social-security-disability-income-for-people-with-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/finding-and-paying-for-treatment/understanding-health-insurance/government-funded-programs/social-security-disability-income-for-people-with-cancer.html)
12. <http://askjan.org/>
13. <http://www.ada.gov/>
14. <http://www.cancerlegalresources.org/>
15. <http://www.eeoc.gov/>
16. <http://www.cancerandcareers.org/>
17. <http://www.survivorshipatoz.org/>
18. <http://askjan.org/>
19. <http://www.ada.gov/>
20. <http://www.cancerlegalresources.org/>
21. <http://www.eeoc.gov/>
22. <http://www.cancerandcareers.org/>
23. <http://www.survivorshipatoz.org/>
24. <http://pressroom.cancer.org/>

## References

Cancer + Careers. *At work*. 2019. Accessed at [www.cancerandcareers.org](http://www.cancerandcareers.org) on February 28, 2019.

Cancer Support Community. *Employment and cancer*. 2019. Accessed at [www.cancersupportcommunity.org](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org) on February 28, 2019

Survivorship A to Z. *Work: Preparing for disability – short term*. 2007. Accessed at [www.survivorshipatoz.org](http://www.survivorshipatoz.org) on February 28, 2019.

United States Department of Labor (DOL): Office of Disability Employment Policy. *Employment laws: Disability & discrimination*. 2010. Accessed at [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov) on February 28, 2019.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). *Disability discrimination*. Accessed at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov) on February 28, 2019.

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). *Questions & answers about cancer in the workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. accessed at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov) on February 28, 2019.

## Additional resources

Along with the American Cancer Society, other sources of information and support include:

**Job Accommodation Network** Toll-free number: 1-800-526-7234 TTY: 1-877-781-9403 Website: <http://askjan.org> (<http://askjan.org>)<sup>12</sup>

This free service from the US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy has information about job accommodations for people with limitations, accommodation ideas, and tips on how to approach employers and ask for accommodations

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Technical Assistance** Toll-free number: 1-800-514-0301 TTY: 1-800-514-0383 Website: [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov) (<http://www.ada.gov>)<sup>13</sup>

For general information about the ADA, answers to specific questions, free ADA materials, or information about filing a complaint

**Cancer Legal Resource Center (CLRC)** Toll-free number: 1-866-843-2572 TTY: 213-

736-8310 Website: [www.cancerlegalresources.org](http://www.cancerlegalresources.org)  
(<http://www.cancerlegalresources.org/>)<sup>14</sup>

Offers free, confidential information and resources on cancer-related legal issues to cancer survivors, their families, friends, employers, and others coping with cancer

**US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** Toll-free number: 1-800-669-4000 TTY: 1-800-669-6820 Website: [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov) (<http://www.eeoc.gov/>)<sup>15</sup>

Offers information on your rights and the laws that apply to your state, including filing charges for discrimination. Also has special information for people with cancer: “Questions and Answers About Cancer in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA),” which can be found on the EEOC website at [www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/cancer.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/cancer.cfm)

**Cancer and Careers** Website: [www.cancerandcareers.org](http://www.cancerandcareers.org)  
(<http://www.cancerandcareers.org/>)<sup>16</sup>

For information on dealing with the potential impact cancer may have on your career, creating an action plan, sharing your diagnosis with employers and co-workers, legal issues, and insurance issues

**Survivorship A to Z, Inc.** Website: [www.survivorshipatoz.org/cancer](http://www.survivorshipatoz.org/cancer)  
(<http://www.survivorshipatoz.org/>)<sup>17</sup>

Has financial, legal, and practical information on dealing with employers and co-workers for people facing a cancer diagnosis

Last Medical Review: May 13, 2019 Last Revised: May 13, 2019

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Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as journalists, editors, and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

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