



Sharing the Diagnosis

LIVING WITH CANCER



Healthy
Workplaces

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SHARING THE DIAGNOSIS

After Diagnosis

It's normal to be very confused and have many questions when you're first diagnosed with cancer. Some of those questions will be about what to do at work. You may wonder about how to tell your boss or even whether you want people at work to know. Only you can make the decisions that are right for you, but it's important to understand that it's hard for people to comfort and support you if they don't know what's going on



To Share or Not to Share the News

Deciding to tell people at work about a cancer diagnosis is a personal decision that will depend on your ability to do your job, your relationship with your co-workers, your feelings about privacy and your previous experience with illness in the workplace (for example, how your co-workers reacted to someone else's news of a serious illness). You have to tell your employer that you have cancer if it's going to affect your ability to do your job. If it's not, you have no legal obligation to share the news. But know that the effort to keep your illness a secret can be very stressful, and you may deprive yourself of possible support at work.

It is against the law to discriminate against someone who has cancer or a physical disability. You can protect yourself from employment discrimination by learning about your rights in the workplace. For more information on your rights in the workplace, contact the [BC Human Rights Coalition](#).

SHARING THE DIAGNOSIS AT WORK

Where to start

A good place to start is with someone in the human resources department. They should have the skills and tools to guide you through the process and be able to explain their policies, including information about benefits and other available assistance. They should also be able to let you know what your employer's responsibilities are to you and can help you talk to your supervisor or manager.

When to tell

Sometimes it's a good idea to wait until your treatment has been planned. That way, you can answer questions about when and for how long you think you'll be off work. However, giving your employer as much notice as possible to arrange coverage during your absence shows commitment to your job and consideration for your co-workers.

Who to tell

If you're going to be off work for long periods of time or your ability to do your job will be affected, you need to tell your employer. You don't need to disclose any details if you don't feel comfortable doing so. You only need to explain how it will affect your performance at work. Employers are often very supportive. If you're a manager, you will probably need to explain the situation to your employees because it will affect daily operations in the workplace.

SHARING THE DIAGNOSIS

Planning Ahead

A cancer diagnosis and treatment may bring financial stress. You may need to spend more money on childcare, help around the house, medicines and therapies not covered by provincial or private health insurance, nutritional supplements, or travel and accommodation for treatment —all at a time when your income may be significantly reduced.

To start:

- Obtain documentation that explains what coverage is included and not included in your health plan, and become familiar with how to submit claims and who to call when you have questions.
- Check into any additional benefits you may be eligible for through any private life or health insurance you have purchased, your credit card benefits or any associations you belong to.

Short-Term or Long-Term Disability

Some employers or private health plans provide partial salary continuance for a specific time period. Ask the following questions:

- Does my employer offer any salary continuance or the option of using sick days before disability benefits payments begin? (Often there is a waiting period before benefits begin, and some companies may bridge the gap during this waiting period.)
- What services are provided through the disability benefits provider? (Depending on the situation, many providers may pay for psychologist's fees, for example.)
- When should I expect my payments?
- How will my payments be received? (cheque or direct deposit)
- How will disability benefits payments be calculated? Are Employment Insurance (EI) or Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) contributions, or provincial or federal tax deducted from the disability benefits payments?
- What can I expect in terms of communication with the disability benefits provider and my employer?

SHARING THE DIAGNOSIS AT WORK

How to tell

It's often hard to decide what information to share with your co-workers. The least personal aspects of a cancer diagnosis to share with co-workers are how your work and their work will be affected by your illness.

A great place to start is to tell people at work about the diagnosis and expected course of treatment, how much time off will be needed and how work will be handled in your absence. If you have a closer relationship with certain co-workers, **it can also be helpful to let them know that your mood, behaviour or ability to do your work may be affected** and that they may need to help you out. You can also consider preparing people for possible changes in your appearance as your treatment progresses.

Some people find comfort and support in talking about their cancer diagnosis with their co-workers. Others prefer to focus on their normal daily tasks rather than on the cancer.

Whichever way works for you, try to **communicate your wishes clearly** so that your co-workers and employer know how best to support you. **Do not be afraid to ask for support.** Social workers, employee assistance programs and employers can all help with many issues and provide support.