



Canadian
Cancer
Society

Healthy
Workplaces

Powered
by



WORKING WHILE IN TREATMENT

One of the many decisions you will have to make is whether to keep working or take a leave while undergoing treatment. You're not alone if you find this decision very hard. It may reassure you to at least know what your options are for taking time from work. Talk to your employer or human resources department about sick leave, vacation leave or leave without pay.

Talk to Your Employer

If you're working while receiving treatment for cancer, be sure to discuss your working arrangements with your employer. Even if you don't need to take time off work, it can be helpful to know what your options are. It may be possible to organize modified duties or a flexible schedule that will work around your needs. Some examples of working arrangements that employers could look into would be: giving extra days off, working part-time, or working from home.

If you decide to take a leave from work while you have treatment for cancer, give your employer as much notice as possible. Be open, honest and realistic about your expectations of the employer. Make sure you understand what they expect of you. This can help minimize stress as your treatment continues.

Taking Time Away from Work

Some people with cancer try to keep working while being treated for cancer. Others take time off work - because they choose to or because they have to. Some cancer treatments may mean taking only a few days off work, but some may require several weeks or months of recovery.

If you are able to continue working, it can help you feel good about yourself. For many of us, our jobs are closely tied to how we see ourselves and our place in the world. Working reminds some people that there is more to their life than cancer. You may find that work can help keep your mind off your illness. Being around other people at work and having their support may also make you feel better.

If you want to continue working as much as you can, tell your healthcare team. It may be possible to arrange treatment times to lessen any impact on work. You can also discuss ways to manage side effects during work hours.

For some people, taking time away from work may feel like a relief. But it can also be stressful if it leads to money problems. If you enjoy your job, it can be hard to give it up. Giving up work, even for a short time, makes some people feel like they've given in to their cancer. If you feel this way, try instead to think of your time off as a chance to focus on your health.

Plan for Fatigue

Chronic fatigue is a major side effect of cancer treatment. Chronic fatigue is different than simply being tired. It can be excessive and constant, may not get better with rest, may persist over time and can interfere with the activities of daily living. Along with symptoms that you might expect such as a lack of energy and trouble getting up in the morning, you may have trouble sleeping, muscle pain, difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly. You may be out of breath after doing small tasks, feel anxious or depressed or lose interest in things you usually enjoy. Your body is using a lot of energy while you're being treated. Everyone's experience is different, but many people treated for cancer find that they must prioritize their activities in order to make sure they do what is most important to them.