

Work (employment)

Cancer can cause changes in many areas of your life. One of these may be your [work life](#). It is hard to know how cancer may affect your work and how long this may last. You will usually need to take time off work to have tests, appointments and treatments. You may also need time off to cope with your feelings. It can be difficult to concentrate and manage your work when you feel anxious, shocked or upset.

Working may be essential for your finances. Or it may give you a sense of normality and routine. You may also have support networks at work that are very important to you. If you have cancer and want to keep working or return to work, you can talk to your employer and find out whether there is any support they can put in place.

Some people [stop working](#) during treatment and for a while after, until they feel ready to go back.

Others carry on working, perhaps with reduced hours. After treatment, returning to work can help you feel like you are getting back to normal. But some people decide not to return to work. Or they choose to do something different. Others may not be able to return to work because of how cancer affects their health.

Tips for working when you have cancer

- Speak to your doctor about how any treatment and its side effects may affect your ability to work. This can help you make decisions about your work life.
- Find out more about [your rights](#). The law considers cancer to be a disability and protects you from [discrimination](#), even if you no longer have cancer.
- You do not have to tell your employer you have cancer or are having cancer treatment. But it may help. It is your choice what you share. If your employer knows about the cancer, they must make [reasonable adjustments](#) (changes) to help you keep working or return to work.
- Talking to the people you work with about cancer can be difficult. Telling colleagues may give them the chance to support you. But you do not have to tell colleagues or share things if you feel uncomfortable.
- Ask your employer about their policies on [sick pay](#), absence, occupational health and pensions. They can also tell you about any employee assistance programme that offers counselling.
- Ask for a fit note (statement of fitness to work). If you are off sick for more than 7 days, you will need a fit note to cover your illness. You can get a fit note from any healthcare professional who has been treating you. For example, this could be your GP, specialist nurse, occupational therapist, pharmacist or physiotherapist. You need a fit note to get sick pay and to claim benefits.
- If you are going to be off work for a while, talk to your employer about how you want to keep in touch.
- Dealing with money and benefits can be particularly hard when you are already coping with cancer. You can call the Macmillan Support Line on **0808 808 00 00** for free to talk to a financial guide or a welfare rights adviser. If you are unable to work during your cancer treatment, there are [different benefits](#) that you may be able to get. Depending on your income, you may be able to [apply for other benefits](#).
- If you are returning to work, agree a return-to-work plan with your employer. This could include reasonable adjustments to the workplace or your job. For example, it may be possible to arrange a phased return to work, where you increase your hours slowly.
- Contact [Access to Work](#) (or [Access to Work Northern Ireland](#)), if you need more support. This scheme can pay for special aids and equipment, or a support worker, to help you in the workplace. It can also cover travel costs to and from work if you cannot use public transport.
- If you are thinking about [stopping work](#) or taking early retirement, you can call our financial guides on **0808 808 00 00**. They can talk through your options and give you advice and support. You can also get advice from an independent financial adviser. Getting the right advice may help you get a higher income from your pension.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Work and cancer](#)
- [Work and cancer – easy read](#)
- [Your rights at work when you are affected by cancer.](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

Other useful contact details

- Access to Work – visit gov.uk/access-to-work or call **0800 121 7479** Textphone **0800 121 7579**
- Access to Work Northern Ireland – visit nidirect.gov.uk
- Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) – visit acas.org.uk or call **0300 123 1100** Textphone **18001 0300 123 1100**
- Macmillan Work Support Service – visit macmillan.org.uk/rightsatwork or call **0808 808 00 00**

Notes and questions
