

Work and cancer series

**WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT WORK AND CANCER



About this tool

This tool has questions you may need to ask about work issues if you are affected by cancer. It can help you find the information you need at every stage.

We hope that using the tool will boost your confidence and support you to deal with any workplace issues you might have.

Not all the questions will be relevant to everyone. For example, not everybody living with and beyond cancer will need to take time off work. This tool is a flexible guide. You can use it to focus on the questions that apply to your situation.

How to use this tool

We have split the questions into four sections about work:

Initial work issues and time off work

These are some of the first questions you may have about work after being diagnosed. It includes questions about taking time off work.

Preparing to go back to work

These questions are about preparing to go back to work after some time off. You might still be going through treatment, or you might have finished your treatment.

Going back to work

These questions are about going back to work after treatment.

If you decide not to go back to work



You may have these questions if you have decided to give up work long-term. You may also use them if you want to leave your current job because of the cancer.

The questions you ask and when you ask them will depend on your situation. You can pick and choose. You may need to ask some questions earlier or later than suggested in the tool.

The questions in each section are split into three areas:

- **health**
- **finance**
- **work.**

Next to each question, you will find a row of boxes. These show all the places you can go for answers.

-  A large tick shows a service or person who is most likely to be able to answer your question.
-  A small tick shows a service or person who may also be able to help.

At the back of this booklet, there are blank pages for notes (pages 23–24). You could use these pages to help you remember what questions you need to ask, and record what you find out.

Services we refer to

We refer to a number of services where you may be able to get answers to your questions:

- **Your oncology team**

This is your team at the hospital. It may include oncologists, radiologists and cancer nurses.

- **GP services**

- **Occupational health**

This may include workplace health and safety advisers, nurses, physiotherapists, counsellors, and GPs. It may not be available at every workplace. In some cases, workplaces give employees access to an external occupational health service. You can find out more from your employer or HR department. If you live in England, Wales or Scotland you can also get occupational health support from the **Fit for Work** service. See page 21 for more details.

- **Your line manager**

- **Your HR department**

- **Advisory services**

These are organisations and programmes that can offer guidance and advice, including helping resolve work disputes. See pages 20–22 for examples of the services available and for contact information.

- **Charities and support groups**

These may include Macmillan Cancer Support, other cancer support charities and local support groups. See pages 22–23 for more details and contact information.

- **Your union**, if you're a member.

If you are self-employed

If you are self employed and so do not have a line manager, HR department or union, our booklet **Self-employment and cancer** may be helpful. It can give you more information about dealing with work issues.

See page 19 for details of all our work and cancer resources and how to order them.



Questions about initial work issues and time off work

Health

How much time will I need to take off work for each of my treatments?
For example surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormonal therapy.

When will each phase of my treatment take place?
Will there be breaks in between?

How does a fit note work? How do I get a fit note?
(A fit note may also be called a medical statement or a doctor's note.)

Which treatment side effects are most likely to interfere with my work?
When might these side effects happen and how long will they last?

Which support services are available to me?
For example, counselling, employee assistance programmes, occupational therapy and vocational rehabilitation.

Finance

If I'm unable to work, what Statutory Sick Pay or company sick pay might be available to me?

Which other benefits might be available to me? How can I get this help?
For example, Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit, or Personal Independence Payment.

If I cannot work, will the benefits I get at the moment be affected?

How long can I claim benefits for?

If I cannot work, can you tell me which of my insurance and payment protection policies I might be able to use?

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
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Work

What policies does my company or organisation have that apply to my situation? Where do I find information about them? For example, there may be policies about absence management, occupational health, sick pay or your employer's pension scheme.

Should I take sick leave or use annual leave for treatment or appointments?

How soon can my sick pay arrangements be confirmed?

If I take time off, what do I need to do to make sure my job is secure?

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Questions about preparing to go back to work

Health

What are the potential short-term and long-term side effects of my cancer and treatment?

How will my treatment affect my physical tasks at work?
For example, will I be able to drive, climb ladders, work shifts, carry heavy objects, work with children or work in a kitchen?

How will my treatment affect my mental tasks at work?
For example, will I be able to concentrate for long periods, work quickly, multi-task, learn new things or memorise information?

What could I do to manage any problems I have at work with mental tasks?

What could I do to deal with fatigue at work?

How can I get help if I'm worried or anxious about going back to work?

Finance

If I return to work or my work situation is adjusted, what would be the impact on my pay and benefits?
For example, how would a phased return, reduced working hours or altered duties affect them?

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
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Work

Where can I find out my legal rights about cancer and work?

Do I need to give my employer any notice before I go back to work?

Can I go back to work gradually after extended sick leave?
This is sometimes called a phased return.

How can I make sure I'm told about changes that have happened while I've been on sick leave?
These may include changes in technology, team members, targets, client base or policy.

How can I make sure the relevant people are involved in my return to work?
These people may include my line manager, my GP, my oncology team, the HR department and occupational health.

Can we work together to decide what we'll tell everyone at work about my cancer and how it will affect my work situation?
These people may include my colleagues, managers and clients.

How can we make sure that my physical work environment doesn't make me uncomfortable?
We may need to think about things like temperature, uniform or the location of toilets.

How can we change my job so that I spend less time on tasks that cause me difficulty?
For example, driving, shift-working or concentrating for long periods.

How can we work together to make decisions about any changes to my job role and description?

Can I have flexible work arrangements to help me manage treatment side effects?
For example, if I'm feeling fatigued could I work reduced or flexible hours, or work from home?

If I find I can't cope once I am back at work, where can I get support?

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Questions about going back to work

Health

How many follow-up medical appointments will I have to go to during working hours?

How much flexibility is there about when and where I have my appointments?

I'm not that confident about returning to work. I worry about my cancer coming back. What support is there to help me?

Finance

Can I have paid time off to go to follow-up medical appointments?

Which benefits can I keep getting while I am working?

Work

Can we review any temporary changes to my work together?

How can we make sure I'm not exposed to infection?

This may mean avoiding close contact with colleagues or working from home when my resistance is lowest.

Can I have regular breaks to help me manage my side effects?

For example, fatigue, pain or dietary requirements.

What might my cancer mean for my career progression?

What might it mean for my pension when I retire?

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Questions if you decide not to go back to work

Health

How can I make sure I stay physically healthy when I'm not working?
How can I stay active?

I'm worried about feeling isolated if I am not working.
Where can I get support?

How can I look after my mental health when I am not working?

Finance

I'm not able to go back to work. Which benefits are available to me?

I'm retiring. Where can I get information about my finances and pension?

Changes in my health may stop me going back to work.
Could I take ill-health retirement?

Work

I left my job because of my cancer. Where can I get advice about changing careers?

Where can I get legal advice on telling my new employer about my illness?

What is my current or previous employer allowed to say about my illness when a future employer asks for a reference?

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
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Further information and support

How we can help

You can call our support line on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm).

Our cancer support specialists can help with medical questions, money worries or just be there to listen if you need someone to talk to. You can speak to:

Welfare rights advisers

You can speak to our welfare rights advisers or search online for a Macmillan benefits adviser near you at **[macmillan.org.uk/benefitsadvisers](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/benefitsadvisers)**

Financial guides

You can speak to our financial guides about your pension, insurance or any other financial planning matter. You can also contact them online at **[macmillan.org.uk/financialguidance](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialguidance)**

If you live in Northern Ireland, you can also call the Macmillan Northern Ireland Macmillan Welfare Benefits Service on **0300 123 3233**.

Want to find out more?

For more information and practical advice about work and cancer visit **[macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)**

Related resources

We have more information about work and cancer for employees:

- **Work and cancer: a guide for people living with cancer**
- **Your rights at work when you are affected by cancer**
- **Self-employment and cancer.**

You can order these resources and more copies of this leaflet by visiting **be.macmillan.org.uk** or calling **0808 808 00 00**



Advisory services

Access to Work **[www.gov.uk/ access-to-work](http://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)**

A government programme that helps people whose health affects the way they do their job. Access to Work can help pay for things like adaptations to equipment you use at work, or travel costs to and from work.

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

Tel 0845 747 4747
www.acas.org.uk

An organisation that helps to resolve work disputes and offers advice to employees and employers.

Citizens Advice **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**

Provides advice on a variety of issues including financial, legal, housing and employment issues.

England and Wales **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**

Scotland **www.cas.org.uk**

Northern Ireland **www.citizensadvice.co.uk**

You can also find advice online in a range of languages at **www.citizensadvice.org.uk/resources-and-tools/languages**

The Fit for Work service

The Fit for Work service is a government-sponsored service introduced in 2015 in England, Wales and Scotland. It is free and confidential.

Fit for Work provides the services of occupational health professionals to working people if they:

- have been off work for four weeks or more
- are likely to be off work for four weeks or more.

The service is available to everyone. It is particularly suitable for people whose employers don't have their own occupational health services.

GPs or employers can refer you to the service. You will then have an assessment, followed by support for your situation.

You can contact the Fit for Work helpline or visit the website to get advice and support:

England and Wales

Tel 0800 032 6235
www.fitforwork.org

Scotland

Tel 0800 019 2211
www.fitforwork.scotland.scot

Northern Ireland

The Fit for Work service is not available in Northern Ireland.

If you live in Northern Ireland, you should contact your workplace occupational health service, if you have one.

Jobcentre Plus
**[www.gov.uk/
contact-jobcentre-plus](http://www.gov.uk/contact-jobcentre-plus)**

Run by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Aims to help people of working age find jobs and help those unable to work in making claims.

Labour Relations Agency – Northern Ireland

Tel 028 9032 1442
www.lra.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, the Labour Relations Agency helps to resolve work disputes and offers advice to employees and employers.

Charities and support groups

MIND

Infoline 0300 123 3393
(Mon–Fri, 9am–6pm)

Email info@mind.org.uk
www.mind.org.uk

Provides advice and support to anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

The Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health
www.niamhwellbeing.org

An independent charity focused on mental health and wellbeing services in Northern Ireland.

Samaritans

Freepost

RSRB-KKBY-CYJK,
Chris, PO Box 9090,
Stirling FK8 2SA

Helpline 116 123

Email jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Provides confidential and non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

The Scottish Association for Mental Health

www.samh.org.uk

Provides help, information and support, and campaigns on behalf of people with mental health problems.



To find other cancer support charities that are relevant to your situation, visit **macmillan.org.uk/organisationsearch**

To find community support groups near you, visit **macmillan.org.uk/supportgroups**

Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third party information or websites included or referred to in it.

Thanks

This leaflet was written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team with support and approval from the Working Through Cancer Programme team at Macmillan. It is based on content originally produced in partnership with Loughborough University and Affinity Health at Work as part of the National Cancer Survivorship Initiative.

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Sources

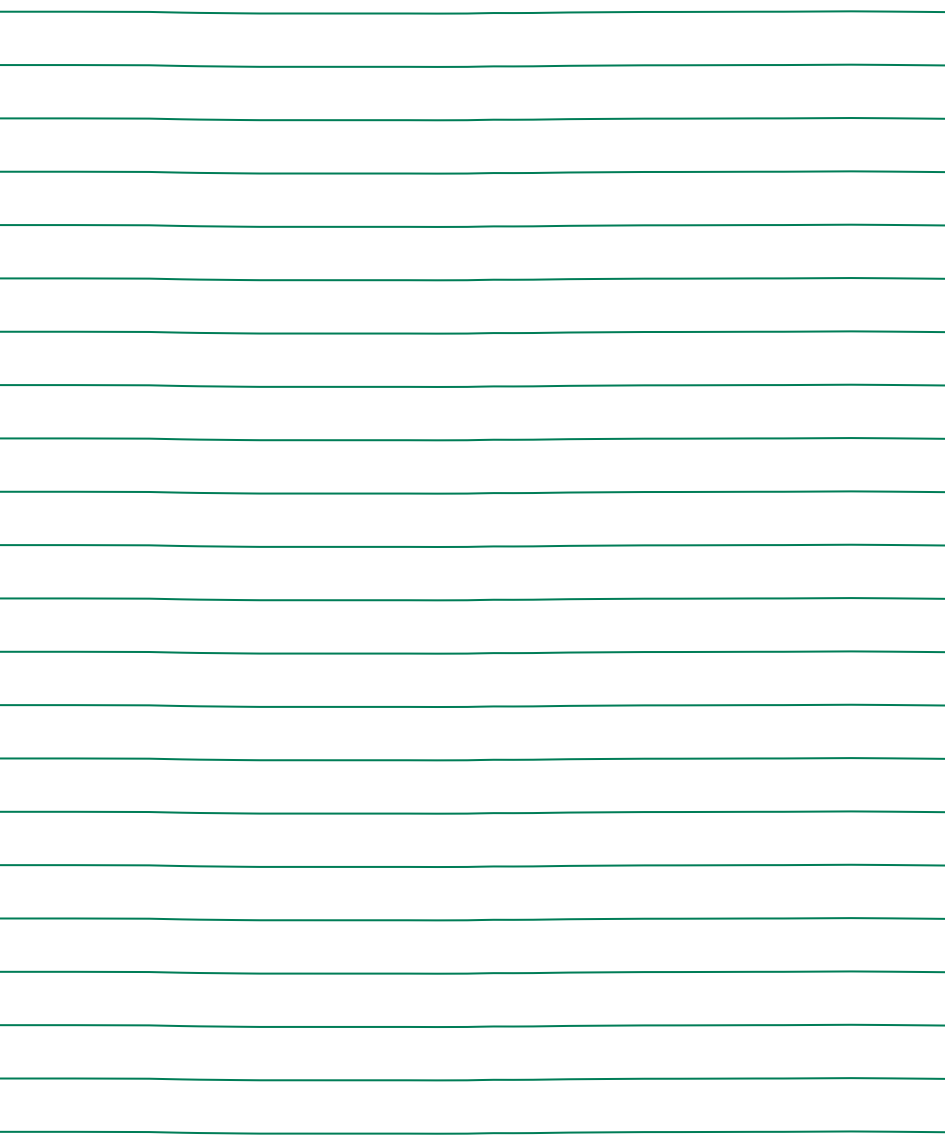
We've listed a sample of the sources used in the publication below. If you'd like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at bookletfeedback@macmillan.org.uk

Fit for work website. www.fitforwork.org (accessed April 2016).

Gov.uk website. Access to work. www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview (accessed April 2016).

YOUR NOTES AND QUESTIONS

A series of horizontal green lines for writing notes and questions. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page, providing a template for handwritten text.



More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

We are the nurses and therapists helping you through treatment. The experts on the end of the phone. The advisers telling you which benefits you're entitled to. The volunteers giving you a hand with the everyday things. The campaigners improving cancer care. The community there for you online, any time. The supporters who make it all possible.

Together, we are all Macmillan Cancer Support.

For cancer support every step of the way, call Macmillan on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm) or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

Hard of hearing? Use textphone **0808 808 0121**, or Text Relay.

Non-English speaker? Interpreters available. Braille and large print versions on request.

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