

GOING BACK TO WORK AFTER CANCER TREATMENT



Going back to work can feel a bit nerve-racking. Planning ahead with your employer will help you get the right support in place and feel positive about returning.

When should I go back?

This should be your choice. We know this isn't always the case if you have financial responsibilities, but as far as you can, make sure you feel physically and emotionally ready.

What do I need to do when I'm ready?

When you do feel well enough and your doctor agrees, let your employer know. Ask them to set up a pre-return meeting, where you can discuss your needs and how your employer can help make things easier for you. You could also explore a phased return, if it would help.

Your employer might ask for your consent to get a medical report from your GP or consultant. This will give them more information about your illness and any adjustments they could make to support you. You can ask for a copy and you can tell your employer that you only want certain people to have access to it.

They may also ask you meet with an occupational health adviser, which is a good opportunity to discuss any adjustments you think would help you return to work.

Can I have someone with me for the meeting?

There will probably be a lot to take in, so it can help to have someone accompany you. This could be a union rep (if you're a member), someone from HR or a colleague you trust. After the meeting, you can run through what was said together and pick up any points you missed.

Someone should write down what's agreed at the meeting and share the notes afterwards. This ensures everyone expects the same things to happen and knows their individual commitments.

Any changes to your contract, like a change in working hours, should be agreed in writing with you.

What if I struggle to do my job now?

Before your pre-return meeting, think about the kind of support you might need at work. All employers have a legal duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' – changes to the workplace to enable you to do your job.

This means that they shouldn't discriminate against you because of your illness – like move you to a lower-paid job or penalise you for time off sick. It also means that your work can (and should) help you to manage your cancer, and any after-effects.

Reasonable adjustments could include allowing you to work flexible hours, having extra breaks if you have fatigue, providing a designated parking space or a more accessible workplace.

If you send your employer some info ahead of the meeting, you'll both be on the same page in terms of what to expect. If you haven't already, you could share our guide '[My employee has cancer](#)' with them. This easy toolkit guides workplaces through each step, from your diagnosis to returning to work. When you scan the QR code below, you'll go to a webpage with a link to the guide.

What if I need time off for treatment or appointments?

If you're still having treatment or need time off work for appointments, you'll need to manage this with your employer. Some may be happy for you not to work on treatment days, and may simply agree to reduce your wages according to the number of days you take off.

Other employers may be happy for you to make up the time on the days when you feel better, or allow you to work from home. Make sure you read and fully understand your organisation's policies on sickness and flexible working.

How will my colleagues react?

You might think of your colleagues as friends – perhaps they were there for you through treatment and understand what's going on. Or you might only have professional relationships at work, where it's not easy to share personal things. Often it's a mix of both.

People don't always react as you'd expect, so be prepared for one or two awkward interactions. Try not to let this throw you. It's ok to say if you don't want to talk about it – or to tell people that you would like to talk. The main thing is to feel comfortable setting your own boundaries and if you're struggling, ask your manager for advice.



Contact us for support, Monday to Friday:

Phone: 0300 303 5220 (9am–5pm)

Email: getsupport@younglivesvscancer.org.uk (9am–5pm)

Live chat at younglivesvscancer.org.uk (10am–4pm)

**Scan the QR code for more info
about returning to work and a link
to our guide for employers**

Young Lives vs Cancer helps young people and their families find the strength to face everything cancer throws at them. We've been there before. We'll face it all, together.