

HOW DO I TELL MY EMPLOYER?



You don't have to tell your employer about your cancer, but there can be big advantages to being open with them – like getting the support you need. Let's look at what they need to do once you've told them.

Who do I tell?

This factsheet looks at your legal rights and what to do if they're not met. But remember, employers and colleagues usually understand this is a stressful time and will do their best to support you.

If you decide to tell your employer, it's best to talk to your line manager or HR directly. If you belong to a union, talking to them first means they can help you in any conversations with your employer.

You could also share our guide '[My employee has cancer](#)' with your manager. This easy toolkit guides workplaces through each step, from your diagnosis to returning to work. Scan the QR code at the end of this factsheet – the webpage has links to the guide and more.

Where should I start?

First, think about the things you feel would help. If you're not sure how things are going to pan out, talk to your team at hospital or a Young Lives vs Cancer social worker. You could ask for:

- Time off for treatment and check-ups
- Changes to your job description, so you spend less time on tasks that cause extra discomfort
- Flexible hours, including working from home, and extra breaks if you have fatigue
- Organising the workplace to make it accessible if you use a wheelchair or crutches
- A designated parking space
- Better ventilation in the workplace if heat makes you feel especially tired or sick
- Clear, regular communication with your line manager and HR, especially at times when you're away
- A phased return to work after treatment, helping to rebuild your stamina and confidence.

What if I need to take time off?

It's likely your cancer treatment will mean taking time off. Your employer should explore with you whether you'd prefer flexible working hours – or you can simply ask them to keep your job open for when you return after sick leave.

What can I expect from my work? What are my rights?

The Equality Act protects disabled people from being treated unfairly. As someone with cancer, you meet the legal definition of 'disabled' from the day you're diagnosed and for the rest of your life.

You don't have to define yourself in this way, but this legal protection is important to get the support you need and protect you from discrimination.

Employers have a legal duty to support you and make reasonable adjustments so you aren't disadvantaged. Failure to do so is a form of discrimination. Large employers may have an occupational health adviser, who can review the specific demands of your job and support the argument for adjustments being made.

How do I know if I've experienced discrimination?

It may be discrimination if you're disadvantaged at work because of your diagnosis, for example:

- Your employer makes it difficult for you to get the sick pay you're entitled to
- Work colleagues make you uncomfortable with remarks/jokes about your treatment or related issues
- Your employer gives you a formal warning for having a lot of time off sick, without taking your cancer diagnosis into account
- Your employer suggests it would be better if you stopped working, because you have cancer
- You're moved to a lower-paid or less demanding job without your agreement, for a reason related to having cancer.

Is money stopping your employer making adjustments?

If so, tell them about Access to Work (see [gov.uk/access-to-work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)). This government scheme can pay for any costs involved in supporting you in the workplace. This includes things like specialist equipment, a support worker or taxis to work if you can't use public transport.

Is my job in danger?

Workplaces vary in structure and size, so what may be 'reasonable' adjustments for one may not be possible for another. If your employer can't make the adjustments you need to return to your old job and they can't find you a suitable alternative, the law may allow your employer to end your contract.

Your employer might be allowed to dismiss you if you can't carry out the main parts of your job, even after all reasonable adjustments have been considered. If you find yourself in this situation, make sure you get support.

Our free Welfare Advice Service can offer advice or signpost to relevant local organisations if you face dismissal. Email welfare.advice@younglivesvs cancer.org.uk or call 0800 915 4439.

Do I have to tell my colleagues?

No, you have the right to ask for your diagnosis to be kept confidential. If your employer tells people about your cancer without your permission, they may be acting in breach of the Data Protection Act.

HR records are confidential, and your personal or medical data must be processed in line with the Data Protection Act and the Access to Medical Records Act.

If you would like your employer to tell other staff members anything about your cancer, you may need to sign a consent form. This gives them permission to tell one or more named individuals.



Contact us for support, Monday to Friday:

Phone: 0300 303 5220 (9am–5pm)

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

Live chat at [younglivesvs cancer.org.uk](https://www.younglivesvs cancer.org.uk) (10am–4pm)

**Scan the QR code for more info
about talking to your employer and
your rights at work**

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.