

Cancer Care Center of York County

A Guide to Help You Return to Work after Cancer

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Returning to work can be both scary and exciting. Some cancer survivors look forward to work as a return to “normal” life and a major milestone in their recovery. Others view work as a financial necessity, and something they would give up if they could. It may help to know that aside from the monetary advantages, there are other benefits of re-entering the workforce.

Returning to work after a cancer diagnosis can:

Bring structure to a daily routine

Help you feel more productive

Provide a sense of purpose

Boost self-esteem

Help you feel connected to others

Promote independence

Be a distraction from worrying about your health

Benefits of Returning to Work

Returning to work after a cancer diagnosis can bring on a whole new set of challenges. However, this guide is here to help you along the way.

To get things started it is important to have a conversation with your doctors about returning to work to be informed about how your specific recovery could potentially affect your ability to work.

By gathering the following documents in an American Cancer Society Personal Health Organizer you will be better informed, stay organized, and have easy access to your information for meetings with your doctors or supervisors.

- Copies of your disability and life insurance policies
- Copies of your written medical records with a summary of your medical history
- Your employers policies on insurance, disability, and time off

You can obtain a Personal Health Organizer from the Cancer Care Center of York County or request one from the American Cancer Society at 1-800-277-2345.

You will also want to schedule a meeting with your human resources department and supervisor to discuss your situation and to be informed of the available support options to help you with this transition.

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act

This law requires that employers must make all reasonable accommodations for you when you return to work. It also protects you from discrimination of general employment practices such as pay, hiring, firing, promotions, leave, or benefits.

Affordable Care Act

This law mandates that affordable health insurance options are available. It also insures that most insurance plans will cover the necessary treatment for people with cancer. You can view the available insurance plans for Maine at www.enroll207.com.

COBRA (Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act)

Provides you and your family members the right to pay the premium and maintain your current group health insurance usually for up to 18 months after you have reduced your work hours, quit your job or lost your job.

FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act)

This law protects you from losing your job for up to 12 unpaid weeks and can be used intermittently. You are able to take a day here and there throughout the year. It also covers your immediate family members as well if they are caring for you.



Creating a Plan

Create a plan to return to work with the help of your supervisor and human resources representative that includes the following:

- How you would like to inform your colleagues. You can be as detailed or vague as you feel comfortable. These people can be a source of support for you while you are at work.
- Consider ways that you can prepare your workspace. This may include making changes to allow you to work as comfortable and efficient as possible to help you maintain your energy levels throughout your day.
- Look at your workload. Is it possible to work from home, reduce the number of work hour per day/week, or work part-time? Making changes to your schedule around when you feel best and are most productive can have a positive effect.
- Name a contact person who will help you manage your workload and connect with you when you are not at work.
- Review with your supervisor or human resources department the short-term and long-term disability programs or a return to work program that may be available to you.

Returning to Work

Implement your plan to return to work.

Remember that fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea will make it difficult to work. By keeping a journal of your symptoms, including when they occur, you may be able to adjust when you take your medications to minimize your side effects while at work.

By scheduling regular meetings with your supervisor you will be able to keep him/her informed of how you are doing and feeling as well as show your commitment to perform your duties to the best of your ability.

With that being said, asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It shows that you are invested in the best results of your responsibilities.



The First Days Back at Work

Communication with supervisors is critical. As you learn how you feel while at work, be sure to communicate with your supervisor to adjust your workload as necessary.

It is also helpful to clear your schedule as much as possible to decrease the amount of additional demands you have when you are not working. This will allow you time to recuperate from a day's work.

The response of friends or coworkers to your cancer treatment may differ. Some may be a huge source of support, while others may be a source of anger or frustration. Some people mean well, but they do not know the right thing to say. Maybe they just don't know how to offer support. Others don't want to deal with your cancer at all.

If friends and coworkers seem unsupportive, it could be because they are anxious for you or for themselves. Your cancer experience may threaten them because it reminds them that cancer can happen to anyone. Try to understand their fears and be patient as you try to regain a good relationship.

Managing your health – Emotional

Managing the stress of cancer is an important component to your recovery.

To reduce stress, promote healing, and learn about available resources contact or visit one of the local cancer resource centers. There are a variety of supportive programs available to survivors including but not limited to support groups, informative sessions, or holistic treatments. Often times these alternative services are offered free of charge.

The American Cancer Society also works collaboratively with local support services. For an up to date list of available resources near you visit the ACS website at www.cancer.org.

**Cancer Care Center of York
County**

27 Industrial Way Sanford, ME
(207) 459-1600
www.cancercareyorkcounty.org

**The Patrick Dempsey Center for
Cancer Hope & Healing**

29 Lowell St. 5th floor
Lewiston, ME 04240
1-877-336-7287
www.dempseycenter.org

Cancer Community Center

778 Main Street
South Portland, ME 04106
(207) 774-2200
www.cancercommunitycenter.org

**Beth C. Wright Cancer Resource
Center**

23 Commerce Park
Ellsworth, ME 04605
(207) 664-0339
www.betwrightcancercenter.org

The eHope Foundation

PO Box 7794
Portland, ME 04112
(207) 856-7340
www.ehope.nu/default.aspx

Cancer Support Center of Maine

147 Main Street
Bucksport, ME 04416
(207) 469-6363
www.cancersupportcenterofmaine.org

Taking Time off from Work

Cancer treatment can be difficult on your body and you may find that the side effects make it impossible to perform your job duties. Taking time off may be necessary. Discuss this with your supervisor in order to create a plan that will work out best for you while you are not at work. During this time use a personal journal to write down frequent notes on important things to remember or do such as: symptoms, appointments, questions, etc. to help stay organized and focused through the following common side effects.

Physical

- ✓ Fatigue – Which is very different from being tired. With fatigue, after sleeping for 8+ hours, rather than waking up feeling refreshed you still feel tired
- ✓ Pain
- ✓ Problems fighting infection
- ✓ Short term memory loss or trouble concentrating often called “Chemo-Brain”



Emotional and Social Issues

- ✓ Rebuilding relationships with friends, family, and coworkers
- ✓ Establishing a new “normal” and returning to day-to-day life
- ✓ Feeling uncertain about the future

Medical History

Name: _____
Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____
Height/Weight: _____

List of Current Medications including dosage, time, and reason you are taking the medication (be sure to include over the counter medicines as well):

Allergies: _____

Conditions that you are currently being treated for and by whom:

List of all previous surgeries, tests, hospitalizations, or therapeutic treatments:

Cancer Treatment History

Name: _____
 Date of Birth: _____ Age: _____
 Height/Weight: _____
 Current cancer diagnosis/suspected diagnosis: _____

Surgery

Type: _____
 Date/Length of stay: _____
 Place where procedure was performed: _____

Doctor: _____

Chemotherapy

Total number of treatments: _____
 Dates of treatment: _____
 Facility where treatment was provided: _____

Side effects: _____
 Results: _____

Radiation Therapy

Total number of treatments: _____
 Dates of treatment: _____
 Facility where treatment was provided: _____

Side effects: _____
 Results: _____

Additional Therapies

Provider: _____
 Type of treatment: _____
 Date of treatments: _____
 Side effects: _____
 Results: _____

Online Resources

Everyone's survivorship journey is unique. Although the internet has a multitude of resources, stick with reputable sites like the American Cancer Society and read information that is up to date to be best informed.

Americans with Disabilities Act: Information for People Facing Cancer

A helpful understanding of the financial and legal matters when it comes to the Americans with Disabilities Act

<http://www.cancer.org/treatment/findingandpayingfortreatment/understandingfinancialandlegalmatters/americans-with-disabilities-act>

Employee Rights and Responsibilities under the Family and Medical Leave Act

An explanation of your rights and benefits at work that are protected by law

<http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/posters/fmlaen.pdf>

Life after treatment: The Next Chapter of Your Survivorship Journey

This is an informative booklet from the American Cancer Society

<http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/content/@editorial/documents/document/acspc-033352.pdf>

The ADA: Your Responsibilities as an Employer

An overview of what your employer is required to do to accommodate your needs at work.

<http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/ada17.html>

The new health care law: What it means for Maine

A list of frequently asked questions about the affordable care act

<http://www.maine.gov/legis/housedems/images/vol4faq.pdf>

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