



Supporting an employee with cancer

A healthy work-life balance can help patients stay on the job and engaged

In the United States, 1 in 2 men and 1 in 3 women will get cancer during their lifetime.¹ Fortunately, today's treatments are better than ever, and more people with cancer survive and live longer. The nation's population of cancer survivors now exceeds 18 million – and a third of them are of working age.²

But people who work while dealing with cancer can experience a negative impact on their employment and income.³ When your business has an employee with cancer or returning to work after cancer treatment, you can support their changing needs at work so they can prioritize their health while maintaining their financial stability.

Tips for helping an employee navigate their cancer care journey

People with cancer can face a great financial burden if they – or their caregivers – work fewer hours, stop working, or lose their health coverage. If a person's income decreases and their medical spending increases, then stress and low self-esteem can worsen their cancer symptoms, and their quality of life can diminish. In extreme cases of financial strain like bankruptcy, patients may stop treatments or medications – putting themselves at greater risk of premature death.⁴

Since a growing number of people with cancer need or want to work, employers are looking for more ways to balance their employee's job with their cancer care journey, from diagnosis to remission.

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Listen and have empathy for their emotional state

This is a life-changing time for your employee. Be understanding of the varied emotions they may be experiencing – fear, distress, sadness, anger, and more. Everyone reacts differently to a cancer diagnosis, and their feelings may change frequently. Even after treatment has ended, cancer survivors are coping with side effects and learning how to adjust to the changes they've gone through.

When your employee talks to you about their cancer, listen and respond with empathy. Don't give them advice or share stories about other people who've had cancer.

It's OK to ask if they plan to share their diagnosis with their co-workers. Whatever choice they make, respect their decision and privacy.

One source of strain for people with cancer can be trying to balance work demands with their treatment and recovery. Support from human resources, supervisors, and co-workers can help your employee perform their work and feel better emotionally.



Comply with employment laws

The cancer death rate fell 32% from 1991 to 2019 – yet people with cancer may face discrimination in the workplace because of assumptions about their ability to work during or after cancer treatment.⁵ Some people who continue to work with cancer can be just as productive on the job as other workers.

Still, your employee may need to modify their work schedule or responsibilities or take some time off work for cancer treatments. And these needs may change – throughout their treatments, recovery, and even in remission.

More people are surviving cancer

32%
drop in the cancer death rate
from 1991 to 2019

"Cancer Facts & Figures 2022,"
American Cancer Society, 2022.



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Your employee's right to equal employment opportunities may be protected by the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#), which requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations that aren't an undue hardship.

If your employee decides to take a leave of absence, help them find information about:

- Company sick leave and paid time off
- State disability insurance
- State-paid family leave
- Federal unpaid leave (Family and Medical Leave Act)

Make a work plan

Throughout their cancer care journey, your employee may need help navigating the workplace so they can continue to work while taking care of their health. By being flexible, you can help your employee stay in the workforce – while retaining your top talent.

Review with them their job responsibilities and your company's policies and benefits. Ask them what accommodations they need to help them do their job. If possible, include an HR representative in meetings between the employee and their supervisor. Check in regularly to adjust accommodations to their changing needs.

Possible workplace accommodations:

- Working from home
- Flextime
- Modified schedule
- Exchanging shifts
- Change in job duties
- Special equipment at work
- Graduated return-to-work plan
- Additional breaks
- Access to a private place to take medication
- Designated parking space near the entrance

**Cancer affects
millions of Americans**

**1 in 2 men
1 in 3 women**
will get cancer during their lifetime

"Cancer Facts & Figures 2022,"
American Cancer Society, 2022.

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Share resources

Connect the employee to specialized resources in your company or community. Some people may first look to an HR representative for help navigating their health coverage. If necessary, direct them to contact their health plan for additional assistance.

Resources you can share:

- Employee assistance programs
- Employee resource groups
- [Mental health](#) and [well-being](#) resources
- Child care services
- [Social health resources](#)
- Health coverage benefits

Keeping your employees healthier at every step

With cancer care from Kaiser Permanente, your employees are surrounded by built-in support – so they have more time to focus on their health.



Prevention and screening

- Unmatched prevention and early detection
- Genetic risk assessment for personalized screening plans
- No costly third-party genetic counseling services – it's part of our care



Diagnosis

- Cancer specialists and oncology experts collaborate to decide the best possible treatment
- Members have access to multiple specialists with different perspectives, experience, and skill sets for second opinions



Treatment

- Cancer patients diagnosed and treated at Kaiser Permanente live longer, healthier lives than people who get care through other health plans⁶



Survivorship

- Seamless cancer treatment paths with fewer obstacles to care

1. "Cancer Facts & Figures 2022," American Cancer Society, 2022, page 14. 2. American Cancer Society, "Cancer Treatment & Survivorship Facts & Figures 2022-2024," January 1, 2022. 3. Victoria S. Blinder, MD, MSc, and Francesca M. Gany, MD, MSc, "Impact of Cancer on Employment," *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, February 1, 2020. 4. See note 3. 5. "Cancer Facts & Figures 2022," American Cancer Society, 2022, page 2. 6. Robert M. Cooper, MD, et al., "Influence of Health Care Systems on Mortality in Adult Patients With Cancer," *The American Journal of Managed Care*, May 13, 2021. Data is from our Southern California region.

Tips adapted from "Cancer in the Workplace: HR Tip Sheet," National Business Group on Health and American Cancer Society, November 2017.