

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT WORK AND CANCER

Work and cancer series – for people living with cancer



If I hadn't seen the Macmillan leaflet, I wouldn't have known support was available. Tracey (Macmillan welfare rights officer) helped me fill in the forms. 🍀

Maureen, diagnosed with ovarian cancer



The Macmillan work and cancer series

Macmillan produces a range of information about work and cancer.

For people living with cancer:

- Work and cancer
- Questions to ask about work and cancer

For employers:

- 10 top tips for line managers
- Managing cancer in the workplace

For people caring for someone with cancer:

- Working while caring for someone with cancer
- Questions for carers to ask about work and cancer

For self-employed people with cancer:

- Self-employment and cancer

More information:

- Your rights at work when you are affected by cancer

About this leaflet

This leaflet 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 this leaflet makes you feel more confident about dealing with any workplace issues you might have. Some of the questions in it may not be relevant to you. You do not have to read it from start to finish. You can use it to focus on the questions that apply to your situation.

We have split the questions into four sections:

- initial work issues and time off work
- preparing to go back to work
- going back to work
- if you decide not to go back to work.

If you are self-employed, our booklet **Self-employment and cancer** has more information about dealing with work issues relevant to you (see page 22).

How to use this leaflet

The questions you need to ask and when you ask them will depend on your situation. You may need to ask some questions earlier or later than suggested in this leaflet. You can decide what works for you.

The questions in each section are split into three areas:

- health
- money
- work.

Next to each question, there is a list of the people or places you can go to 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.

You might want to write down what questions you need to ask, and what you find out.

Quotes

In this leaflet, we have included quotes from Maureen, who is on the cover. To share your experience, visit [macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory)

Services we mention

There are a lot of services that may be able to help answer your questions. These are the services we mention in this leaflet:

- Oncology team – this is your cancer team at the hospital. It may include oncologists, radiologists and cancer nurses. In some services, it may also include a social worker.
- GP service – this is your doctor’s surgery.
- Occupational health professionals – these may include workplace health and safety advisers, nurses, physiotherapists, counsellors, and GPs. They may not be available at every workplace. Your work may offer an external occupational health service. You can find out more from your employer or HR manager.
- Line manager – this is your manager at work.
- HR manager – this is someone in the human resources or recruitment team at your work.
- Advisory services – these are organisations that offer guidance, including help resolving work disputes (see pages 24 to 27).
- Charities and support groups – these may include a Macmillan work support adviser (see page 23), other cancer support charities (see pages 24 to 27), local support groups and online forums.
- Unions – these are trade or labour unions that you may be a member of.

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Questions about initial work issues and time off work

These may be the first questions you have about work after being diagnosed. They include questions about taking time off work.

Health

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health professionals	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
How much time will I need to take off work for treatment?	✓	✓	✓					
When will each stage of my treatment happen? Will there be breaks between treatments?	✓	✓	✓					
What is a Statement of Fitness for Work, or fit note? How do I get one?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Are there any possible treatment side effects that could cause me problems with work? When might these side effects happen and how long could they last?	✓	✓	✓					
Which support services are available to me? For example, can I have counselling, occupational therapy or vocational rehabilitation, or get support from an employee assistance programme?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

'I got sick pay for the contracted two days a week I was working at the time.'

Maureen

Money

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health professionals	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
If I cannot work, what Statutory Sick Pay or company sick pay might I be able to get?				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Are there any benefits that I might be able to get? For example, could I apply for Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit, or Personal Independence Payment. How do I get benefits?					✓	✓	✓	✓
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, which insurance and payment protection policies can I use?					✓	✓	✓	✓
If I am off work for a long time, could this affect my life insurance cover? For example, would it affect my death in service benefit?				✓	✓	✓		

'A Macmillan welfare rights officer talked me through everything I was entitled to. They also helped me fill out the forms, and made sure I was financially stable so I could concentrate on getting better.'

Maureen

Work

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health professionals	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
What policies does my employer have that apply to my situation? Where do I find information about them? For example, are there policies about absence management, occupational health, sick pay or employer pension schemes?			✓	✓	✓			✓
Should I take sick leave or use annual leave for treatment or appointments?				✓	✓			✓
When can my sick pay be confirmed?				✓	✓			
If I take time off work, what do I need to do to make sure my job is secure?			✓	✓	✓			✓
If I cannot go back to work, can I take ill health retirement?				✓	✓	✓		

Questions about preparing to go back to work

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

Health

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health professionals	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
Are there any possible treatment side effects that could cause me problems with work? When might these side effects happen and how long could they last?	✓	✓	✓					
How might treatment affect my ability to do 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 might treatment affect my ability to do 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? For example, what could help with difficulty concentrating?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
What could help me cope with fatigue at work?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Where can I get help if I am worried or anxious about going back to work?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Money

If I go back to work or my work situation changes, what impact will that have on my pay and benefits? For example, how would working fewer hours or doing different tasks affect them?				✓	✓	✓		✓
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Work

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health professionals	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
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 slowly after taking extended sick leave (a phased return)?				✓	✓			✓
How can I make sure I am told about changes that have happened at work while I have been on sick leave? For example, if there have been changes to technology, team members, targets, client base or policy.				✓	✓			✓
How can I make sure the relevant people are involved in my return to work? For example, involving my line manager, GP or oncology team, HR manager and occupational health.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Can we agree on what to tell people at work about the cancer and how it will affect my work? For example, what to tell colleagues, managers and clients.			✓	✓	✓			
How can we make sure that my physical work environment is comfortable? For example, can we talk about things like temperature, sanitation, uniform or the location of toilets?			✓	✓	✓			
How can we change my job so that I spend less time on tasks that are difficult for me? For example, doing less driving or shift-work, or not needing to concentrate for long periods.			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
How can we work together to agree on any changes to my job and job description?			✓	✓	✓			✓
Can I have flexible working to help me manage treatment side effects? For example, if I am feeling fatigued, could I work fewer hours or flexible hours, or work from home?			✓	✓	✓			✓
If I find it difficult to cope when I am back at work, where can I get support?			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Can we have regular meetings to review my working arrangements?				✓	✓			

Questions about going back to work

These questions are about going back to work after treatment.

Health

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health professionals	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
How many follow-up medical appointments might I need to have? How much flexibility is there about when and where I have my appointments? For example, can I have them outside of working ours?	✓	✓						
I am not very confident about going back to work. I am worried about my cancer coming back. What support can I get?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Money

Can I have paid time off to go to follow-up medical appointments?				✓	✓			✓
Which benefits can I keep getting when I go back to work?						✓	✓	

Work

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health professionals	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
Can we talk about any temporary changes to my work?			✓	✓	✓			✓
How can we make sure I am not at risk of infection at work? For example, is it possible for me to avoid close contact with colleagues, or work from home when I am most likely to get an infection?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Can I have regular breaks to help me manage my side effects? For example, to help me cope with fatigue, pain or changes to my diet.			✓	✓	✓			✓
What affect might the cancer have on my career progression?			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Can we have regular meetings to review my working arrangements?				✓	✓			
What might changes to my work mean for my pension when I retire?			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Questions if you do not go back to work

These are questions you may have if you have decided to stop working because of the cancer.

Health

	Oncology team	GP	Occupational health professionals	Line manager	HR	Advisory services	Charities and support groups	Union
How can I make sure I stay physically healthy when I am not working? How can I stay active?	✓	✓					✓	
I am worried about feeling lonely if I am not working. Where can I get support?	✓	✓				✓	✓	
How can I look after my mental health when I am not working?	✓	✓					✓	

Money

I cannot go back to work. Are there any benefits that I might be able to get?					✓	✓	✓	✓
I am 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 early retirement?			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

Work

I left my job because of the cancer. Where can I get advice about changing careers?						✓	✓	
Where can I get legal advice on telling my new employer about the cancer?						✓	✓	✓
What is my current or previous employer allowed to say about the cancer when a future employer asks for a reference?					✓	✓	✓	✓

Further information and support

Find out about our expert, up-to-date information about cancer and other ways we can help you. All our information is free for everyone.

Order what you need

To order more booklets or leaflets visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**. All our information is also available online at **macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support**

We provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- easy read booklets
- eBooks
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats**
If you would like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk** or call **0808 808 00 00**.

Other ways we can help

Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. We can help with medical questions, benefits, financial guidance and local services, or just be there to listen. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **macmillan.org.uk/talktous**

Information centres

Our centres are based in hospitals, libraries and on mobile buses. You can talk to someone or get more information. Find your nearest centre at **macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres** or call **0808 808 00 00**.

Support groups

You can find support groups in your area by calling **0808 808 00 00** or visiting **macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport**

You may also want to use our Online Community to make friends, blog, and read stories. Visit **macmillan.org.uk/community**

Help with money worries

Our financial guidance team can help you with money worries and accessing benefits. Macmillan also offers one-off grants – for anything from heating bills to extra clothing. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or visit **macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport**

Help with work and cancer

Whether you are an employee, a carer, an employer or self-employed, we can help. Visit **macmillan.org.uk/work** or call **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a work support adviser (Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm).

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

Work and employment

Access to Work

Tel 0800 121 7479

Textphone 0800 121 7579 (Mon to Fri, 8am to 7.30pm)

www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Provides advice and practical support to people with long-term health conditions and their employers. This helps pay for practical support so you can do your job.

Access to Work (NI)
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/access-work-practical-help-work

Gives support and advice to employees with disabilities and their employers.

To apply for assistance through this programme, speak to an adviser at your local Jobs and Benefits office.

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

Helpline 0300 123 1100 (Mon to Fri, 8am to 6pm)

www.acas.org.uk

Gives advice to employees and employers to help improve working life and relations. Offers information, advice and training.

Equality Advisory Support Service (EASS)

Tel 0808 800 0082

Textphone 0808 800 0084 (Mon to Fri, 9am to 7pm, and Sat 10am to 2pm)

www.qualityadvisoryservice.com

Promotes equality and provides information to people about their rights in England, Scotland and Wales.

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI)

Tel 028 9050 0600

Email information@equalityni.org

www.equalityni.org

Aims to advance equality, promote equality of opportunity, encourage good relations and challenge discrimination through promotion, advice and enforcement.

Labour Relations Agency

Tel 0330 055 5300

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

Email info@lra.org.uk

www.lra.org.uk

Promotes the improvement of employment relations in Northern Ireland. Provides advice and support to employees and employers, and helps resolve disputes.

WorkSmart

www.worksmart.org.uk

Part of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), this website provides information on employment rights, health at work and financial matters.

Financial support

Citizens Advice

Provides advice on a variety of issues including financial, legal, housing and employment issues. Use their online webchat or find details for your local office in the phone book or by contacting:

England

Helpline 0344 411 1444

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Wales

Helpline 0344 477 2020

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales

Scotland

Helpline 0808 800 9060

www.cas.org.uk

GOV.UK

www.gov.uk

Has information about social security benefits and public services in England, Scotland and Wales.

Macmillan Benefits Advice Service

(Northern Ireland)

Tel 0300 123 3233

NiDirect

www.nidirect.gov.uk

Has information about benefits and public services in Northern Ireland.

General cancer support organisations**Cancer Black Care**

Tel 020 8961 4151

www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Offers UK-wide information and support for people from Black and ethnic minority communities who have cancer. Also supports their friends, carers and families.

Cancer Focus**Northern Ireland**

Helpline 0800 783 3339

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 1pm)

Email nurseline@cancerfocusni.org

cancerfocusni.org

www.cancerfocusni.org

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland.

Cancer Research UK

Helpline 0808 800 4040

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

www.

cancerresearchuk.org

A UK-wide organisation that has patient information on all types of cancer. Also has a clinical trials database.

Cancer Support Scotland

Tel 0800 652 4531

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

Email info@cancersupportscotland.org

cancersupportscotland.org

www.cancersupportscotland.org

Runs cancer support groups throughout Scotland. Also offers free complementary therapies and counselling to anyone affected by cancer.

Maggie's Centres

Tel 0300 123 1801

Email enquiries@maggiescentres.org

maggiescentres.org

www.maggiescentres.org

Has a network of centres in many locations throughout the UK. Provides free information about cancer and financial benefits. Also offers emotional and social support to people with cancer, their family, and friends.

Penny Brohn UK

Helpline 0303 3000 118

(Mon to Fri, 9.30am to 5pm)

Email helpline@pennybrohn.org.uk

pennybrohn.org.uk

www.pennybrohn.org.uk

Offers physical, emotional and spiritual support across the UK, using complementary therapies and self-help techniques.

Tenovus

Helpline 0808 808 1010

(Daily, 8am to 8pm)

Email info@tenovuscancercare.org.uk

tenovuscancercare.org.uk

www.tenovuscancercare.org.uk

Aims to help everyone in the UK get equal access to cancer treatment and support. Funds research and provides support such as mobile cancer support units, a free helpline, benefits advice and an online 'Ask the nurse' service.

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. Some photos are of models.

Thanks

This leaflet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by 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.

Thanks to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and those who shared their stories.

We welcome feedback on our information. If you have any, please contact us at cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk

Sources

If you would like information about the sources we use, please contact us at cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk

This leaflet 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 this leaflet makes you feel more confident about dealing with any workplace issues you might have.

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call **0808 808 00 00** (7 days a week, 8am to 8pm) or visit macmillan.org.uk

Would you prefer to speak to us in another language? Interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use. Are you deaf or hard of hearing? Call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these, visit macmillan.org.uk/otherformats or call our support line.

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU

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