

BEFORE YOU TELL WORK

A practical support sheet for work, privacy, treatment, and what you are ready to say

Why this guide exists

Telling work about cancer can feel like another diagnosis conversation. You may be worried about your job, money, privacy, being treated differently, or how treatment may affect what you can do.

This guide is not legal or employment advice. It is a thinking sheet to help you prepare.

Before you speak to anyone

Diagnosis, if ready to write it

Treatment mentioned

Known appointment or treatment dates

Possible time off

Symptoms affecting work

Things still unknown

Who needs to know first?

- ☐ Manager
- ☐ HR
- ☐ Occupational health
- ☐ Trusted senior person
- ☐ Business owner
- ☐ Trusted colleague
- ☐ Nobody yet, if there is no immediate work impact

What work may need to know

- ☐ That you have a serious health issue
- ☐ That you may need time for appointments or treatment
- ☐ That energy or capacity may change
- ☐ That temporary adjustments may be needed
- ☐ Who should be contacted if plans change

What I am ready to say

I am ready to tell them

I am not ready to tell them

I want to keep private

I need them to understand

I want to ask for

A simple first message

I need to let you know that I am dealing with a serious health issue. I have been diagnosed with cancer and I am still getting information about treatment and next steps. I would like to arrange a private conversation to discuss what this may mean for work.

Possible support to ask about

- Time off for appointments
- Temporary reduced hours
- Working from home
- Adjusted duties
- Flexibility around treatment days
- Privacy around your diagnosis
- Phased return after time off
- A single point of contact
- Written confirmation of arrangements

What not to promise too early

A safer sentence is: I want to keep working as much as I reasonably can, but I may not know what I need until treatment starts.

After the conversation

Date

Who I spoke to

What I shared

What was agreed

What still needs confirmation

Who else will be told

What will stay private

Next review date

A note about advice

Workplace rights, sick pay, privacy rules, and support options vary by country, job, contract, and circumstances. Seek qualified local advice where needed.