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[Finding a Job After Cancer](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 09/2015

For some cancer survivors, looking for a new job or reentering the job market is a challenging experience. However, your cancer history should not affect your ability to get a job. If you meet the qualifications for a job, an employer cannot refuse to hire you simply because you have had cancer. Outside of having physical or mental challenges that limit the type of work you can do, you are employable.

Discrimination concerns

Most employers treat cancer survivors fairly and legally. However, some cancer survivors experience discrimination when looking for a job. Cancer-related discrimination usually comes from:

- Misunderstanding of cancer and its treatments,
- Stereotypes about cancer, or
- Incorrect assumptions about what cancer survivors can or cannot do on the job.

Cancer survivors have protection from both state and federal laws. These include the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Family and Medical Leave Act. Learn more how these laws can help protect you if you experience [discrimination in the workplace](#) [3].

Deciding what information to share

Cancer, cancer treatment, or [late effects](#) [4] may affect a person's ability to perform the duties of a specific job. Late effects are side effects that occur several years after a cancer diagnosis. Some survivors decide to share their medical history with their employer, while others do not. It's a personal choice. Read tips for talking about your cancer experience when [going back to work after cancer](#) [5].

During the interview process and while employed, an employer, by law, cannot ask questions about your health. They cannot ask if you have or have had cancer, or about any other medical condition. You can choose to tell a potential employer about your cancer history. The employer is still not allowed, by law, to ask you any questions about the cancer, the treatment you received, or the prognosis (chance of recovery). The employer also must keep any information you share about your history of cancer or any other medical information confidential. An employer can, however, ask questions related to the specific duties and responsibilities of the job. They can ask questions about whether you can lift up to 50 pounds or travel, for example.

When applying and interviewing for a new job, some cancer survivors worry. How they will explain gaps in their work history? What were their reasons for leaving positions they had before their cancer diagnosis or treatment? Talk with a career counselor or social worker if you have concerns about explaining employment gaps. He or she can teach you interviewing skills and help you organize your résumé by experience and skills, instead of by date. Learn more about [how an oncology social worker can help](#) [6].

You can decide to disclose your cancer history. A letter from your doctor that explains your current health status and ability to work may be helpful.

Requesting reasonable accommodations

Sometimes the cancer, cancer treatment, or both cause limitations, such as:

- [Fatigue](#) [7]
- [Chronic pain](#) [8]
- [Attention, thinking, or memory problems](#) [9]

These are disabilities under the ADA. According to this law, if a person is qualified to do his or her job, employers must make adjustments for employees with disabilities to allow them to perform the essential functions of their job. These adjustments are "reasonable accommodations." Reasonable accommodations vary from person to person. Examples of

reasonable accommodations may include:

- Adjusted work hours
- Permission to work from home
- Reassignment to another position
- Leave time for doctor visits
- Periodic work breaks to take medications and contact members of your health care team

If you know you'll need an accommodation for a job, you don't have to make the request during the interview. You can request an accommodation at any time during your employment. A request for a reasonable accommodation can be made on your behalf by a medical professional, family member, or friend.

An employer may request documentation that verifies your disability before granting a reasonable accommodation. However, employers cannot ask for your medical records. An employer may deny a request if the accommodation would cause an "undue hardship." An undue hardship could be things like, being too difficult or expensive to implement. However, an employer has to determine if there is an easier or less costly accommodation that can meet your needs.

Insurance concerns when job searching

It is important for cancer survivors to have dependable health insurance. Some, but not all, employers offer group health insurance plans. If you are considering a job that includes the benefit of group insurance, you have rights under federal and state laws:

- You are entitled to health insurance under your employer's health plan because you are a cancer survivor.
- Some group health plans may temporarily exclude coverage related to a prior health condition, such as cancer. This is a pre-existing condition exclusion period. However, for plan years starting on or after January 1, 2014, insurance companies cannot deny coverage or charge you more under group insurance because of a pre-existing condition. Once you have insurance, coverage for a pre-existing condition will begin immediately.

Learn more about [the new health care law and cancer](#) [10].

- If you have recently left a job that offered group health insurance, consider keeping the insurance by signing up for coverage under [COBRA](#) [11] (the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act). COBRA gives you the right to temporarily keep your group health insurance benefits if you reduce your hours, quit your job, or lose your job. You may have to pay the full cost, though. The length of time you can keep COBRA coverage depends on individual circumstances. If you qualify for COBRA coverage, you must sign up for these benefits within 60 days of the date you lost your coverage or the date the COBRA election notice was provided by your employer or plan administrator.

Coping with emotional concerns when job searching

Looking for a job is often stressful and discouraging for all types of job seekers. Therefore, it is important to take care of your emotional needs during this time. Stress-reducing activities can help clear your mind and keep you motivated toward your goals. Try activities such as exercising or participating in favorite hobbies.

Some job seekers find encouragement in [support groups](#) [12]. These groups connect seekers with other people who are looking for work. These groups also provide suggestions and tips on networking with potential employers. They can also be good resources for learning about potential job openings. In addition, books and career counselors can provide guidance on how to network effectively. Taking proactive steps can boost your self-esteem and help you stay positive while you are looking for employment.

More Information

[Survivorship](#) [13]

[Sharing Your Story](#) [14]

[Finding Support and Information](#) [15]

Additional Resources

[U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: Questions and Answers About Cancer in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) [16]

[U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: Job Applicants and the Americans with Disabilities Act](#) [17]

[HealthCare.gov](#) [18]

Links

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/survivorship/life-after-cancer/finding-job-after-cancer>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25298>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25396>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24549>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/30961>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25048>
- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25259>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25044>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24921>
- [11] <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/health-plans/cobra.htm>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>
- [13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22>
- [14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24672>
- [15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/30666>
- [16] <http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/cancer.cfm>
- [17] <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html>
- [18] <https://www.healthcare.gov/>