

## **Finding a Job After Cancer** [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 10/2013

### **Key Messages:**

- Knowing your rights and the laws that protect you while you look for a job can give you peace of mind.
- You do not have to share personal information about your experience with cancer unless it will affect how you perform the job responsibilities.
- You can ask your employer for reasonable accommodations, or adjustments to your work environment, so you can effectively perform your tasks, even without discussing it during the interview process.
- Having dependable health insurance is important for cancer survivors, and you have rights under federal and state laws if a potential employer offers group insurance as a benefit.

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

### **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 a 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 are protected by both state and federal laws, including 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] (side effects that occur several years after a cancer diagnosis) may affect a person's ability to perform the duties of a specific job. 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 or about a medical condition, such as whether you have had cancer. If you 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. However, an employer can ask questions related to the specific duties and responsibilities of the job, such as whether you can lift up to 50 pounds or travel.

When applying and interviewing for a new job, some cancer survivors worry about how they will explain gaps in their work history or their reasons for leaving positions they had before their cancer diagnosis or treatment. If you are concerned about explaining gaps in employment, it may be helpful to talk with a career counselor or social worker. 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].

If you do decide to disclose your cancer history, you may find it helpful to provide the potential employer with a letter from your doctor that explains your current health status and ability to work.

### **Requesting reasonable accommodations**

Sometimes the cancer, cancer treatment, or both cause limitations, such as [fatigue](#) [7], [chronic pain](#) [8], and [cognitive difficulties](#) [9], that are considered 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 called "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, or periodic work breaks to take medications and contact members of your health care team.

If you know you will need an accommodation for a specific job, you do not have to make the request during the interview process; you can request an accommodation at any time during your employment. A request for a reasonable accommodation can also be made on your behalf by someone else, such as a medical professional, family member, or friend.

An employer may request documentation that verifies your disability before granting a reasonable accommodation. However, employers are not permitted to ask for your medical records. An employer may deny a request if the accommodation would cause an "undue hardship," such as being too difficult or expensive to implement. However, an employer is required to determine if there is an easier or less costly accommodation that can be made to 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 cannot be refused health insurance under your employer's health plan because you are a cancer survivor.
- Currently, some group health plans will temporarily exclude coverage related to a prior health condition, such as cancer. This is called 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.
- If you have recently left a job that offered group health insurance, consider keeping the insurance by signing up for coverage under [COBRA](#) [10] (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; however, you may have to pay the full cost. 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, especially in a tough economic climate. Therefore, it is important to take care of your emotional needs during this time. Stress-reducing activities, such as exercising or participating in favorite hobbies, can help clear your mind and keep you motivated toward your goals.

Some job seekers find encouragement in [support groups](#) [11], which help them connect with other people who are looking for work. These groups also provide suggestions and tips on networking with potential employers and can 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](#) [12]

[The Affordable Care Act and Cancer](#) [13]

[Cancer Myths](#) [14]

[Sharing Your Story](#) [15]

[Support and Resource Links](#) [16]

### **Additional Resources**

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

[17]

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: Job Applicants and the Americans with Disabilities Act [18]

HealthCare.gov [19]

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**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/24556>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25048>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25259>

[9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25044>

[10] <http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/health-plans/cobra.htm>

[11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25383>

[12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/22>

[13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24921>

[14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24460>

[15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24672>

[16] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25325>

[17] <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/cancer.html>

[18] <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html>

[19] <https://www.healthcare.gov/>