



Supporting employees through cancer

**Practical guidance to create an inclusive
workplace for cancer patients**

Visit us at: www.reframe.co.uk

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Introduction

Cancer is a very emotive subject and talking about it is often difficult, or even still a taboo – especially in the workplace.

The fact is though, there will be many people impacted by cancer at work, either personally or caring for a loved one. For many people, working through cancer and its treatment is important – both financially and to give them a sense of stability and normality. With the right support, this is possible for many patients.




So how do you make sure your workplace supports people through a life-changing diagnosis?

We've pulled together practical tips to help you – including understanding how cancer can impact people at work, how to handle conversations about cancer sensitively and ways you can make your workplace more inclusive for people working through cancer.



- 50%** of people with cancer are **afraid to tell their employers**¹
- 87%** of people say its **important to continue working** when diagnosed with cancer²
- 900k** people (**2.7%**) of the working population are affected by cancer in the UK³

In this guide, you will learn:

-  How cancer can **impact someone at work** and what you can do to help
-  Improve understanding of **reasonable adjustments** for cancer patients
-  How to have **sensitive conversations** about cancer
-  **Five ways** you can improve cancer support in your workplace
-  Ways to reduce risk of cancer discrimination

Cancer is considered a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

This means employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure patients are not at a disadvantage because of their diagnosis. **This protection continues even after remission.**



How cancer can impact someone at work and what you can do to help

Everyone's experience of cancer will be different, and individual to them. There are many different types of cancer, and different treatments – as well as everyone experiencing different thoughts and feelings at different stages of the journey.

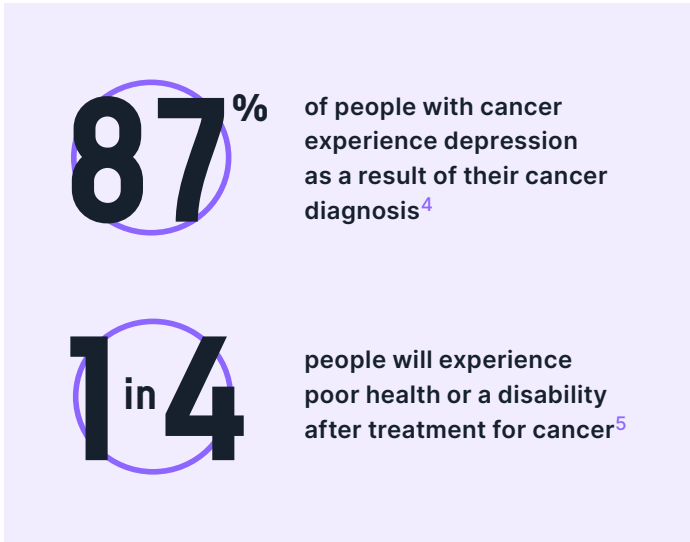
How can cancer affect people?

Cancer and its treatment often cause physical changes, such as:

- Changes in appearance, for example, hair loss, scarring, weight loss or weight gain
- Pain
- Nausea
- Compromised immune system

Some cancer treatments can cause long-term changes to how the body works, including:

- Fatigue
- Mood or emotional changes
- Sexuality and fertility issues
- Menopausal symptoms
- Pain
- Bowel and bladder issue
- Cognitive problems (memory, concentration and thinking)
- Permanent changes to taste, smell, sight, and hearing
- A second cancer



How might these effects impact someone's ability to do what they could do before cancer?

Side effects may affect how long someone can work for, their emotions and how they relate to people.

They may experience:

- Difficulty performing ordinary tasks
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things
- Suddenly feeling exhausted during meetings or after light activity
- Difficulty controlling their emotions
- Needing to be near a toilet or have other facilities easily available

What adjustments and support can you provide to help at work?

Some people find that working through cancer really helps their mental and physical well-being. Reasonable adjustments alongside support with their physical and emotional changes can help people to manage working through cancer or returning to work after treatment.

Adjustments may include:

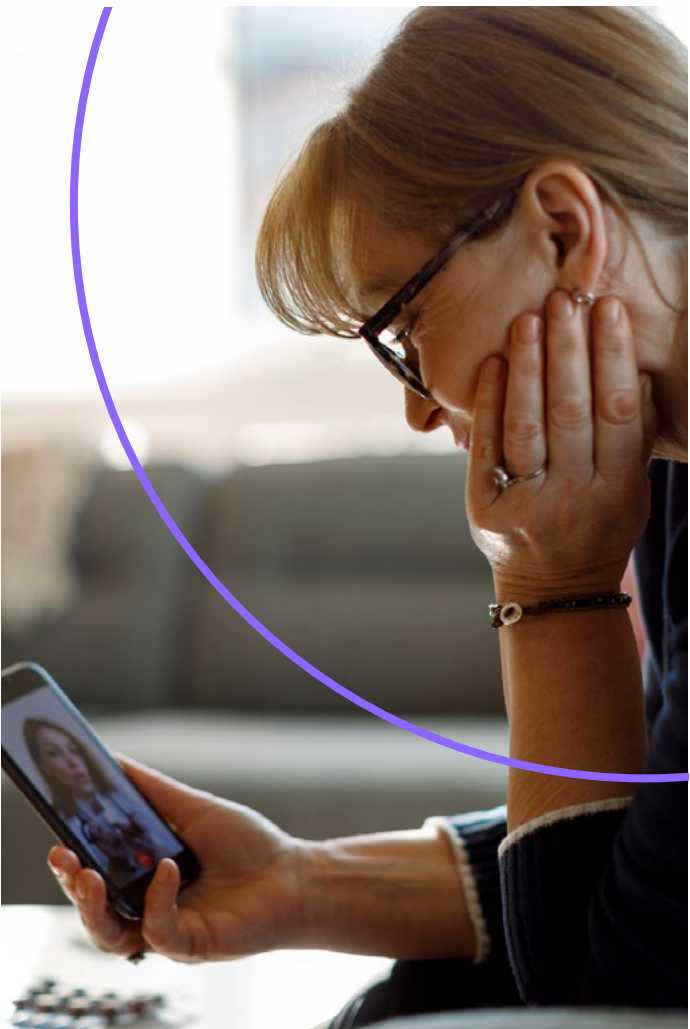
- Flexible working
- Shift or location changes
- Adjusting the working environment (e.g., closer to toilet facilities, making private spaces available)
- Reducing workload or specific tasks

Most importantly

Everyone has a different experience of cancer, and will need different support. It's most important to be flexible and find out more about the person's circumstances and how their cancer has affected them so you can provide the right support for them.

Reframe Cancer Nurse Specialists can help by providing:

- Support for patients** with managing side effects and working through treatment, or returning to work after treatment
- Guidance** on making reasonable adjustments based on the patient's specific circumstances
- Advising HR teams and line managers** on having conversations about making reasonable adjustments



⁴ Macmillan. Worried Sick: [The Emotional Impact of Cancer](#). ⁵ Macmillan. [Long-term Consequences of Cancer and its Treatment](#).

What to say when talking about cancer

People often find it tough to know the right thing to say and do when someone shares that they have cancer, or that they're supporting someone they love through cancer.

Here are some thoughtful words to say, and some things to avoid when talking about cancer.



What to say



Ask "How are you feeling?"

Invite them to speak freely and openly about their feelings.



Check you have understood by asking "Do you mean...?"

Asking questions to make sure you understand will help avoid misunderstandings and show you are listening attentively.



Give examples when you ask how you can support them

You could say, "How would you like me to support you? I was wondering about this, but I want to make sure it's something you want." Giving examples takes pressure off them to think of the answers, but by checking with them if it's what they need you show that you're flexible to support in different ways.



What not to say



Don't start sentences with "At least..."

E.g. "At least your/your friend's cancer was caught early." Or "At least it wasn't worse."

You may be trying to encourage a positive outlook on their experience, but this could make them feel that what they have been through is being minimised.



Avoid telling stories of someone you know who'd been in a similar position

You may be saying it from a very good place, however it could minimise the person's experience or make them feel misunderstood.



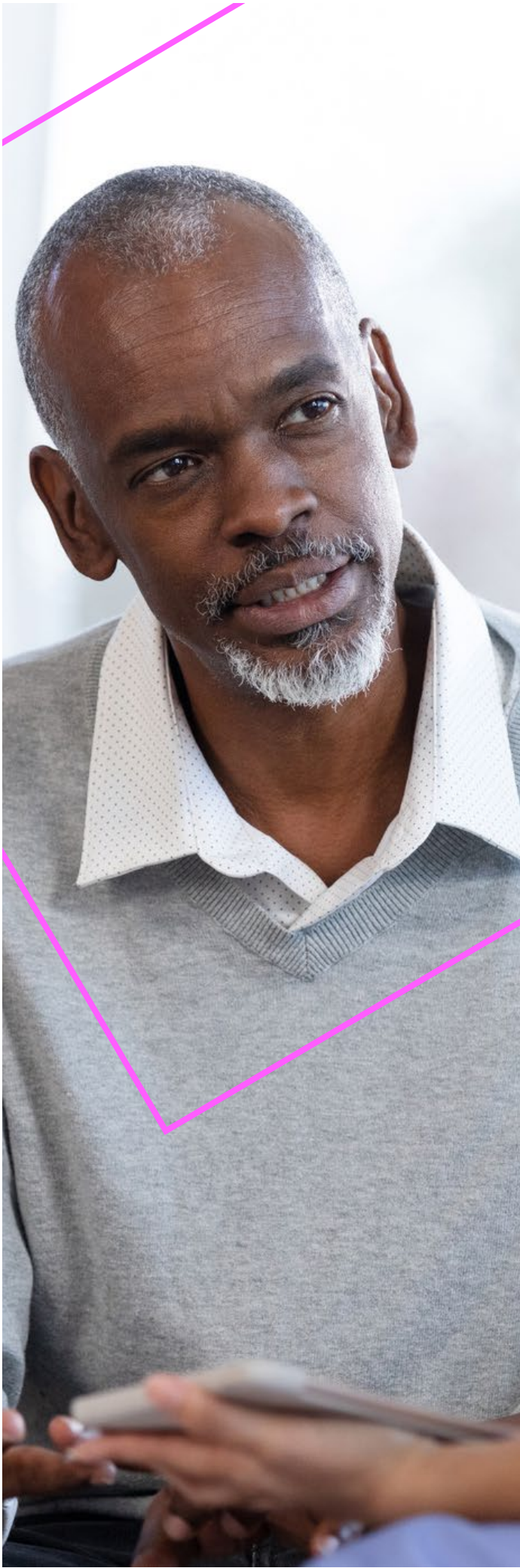
Avoid "Don't you think...?" questions

These are leading questions that enforce your opinion. To help maintain an open conversation, try "I was wondering if XYZ could be an option because of ABC. What are your thoughts?"

Reframe Cancer help by providing:



Specialist workplace guidance on having conversations about cancer – for HR teams and line managers



5 ways to better cancer support

You want your workplace to be a supportive, inclusive environment to retain the best people, and enhance employee well-being.

These 5 practical tips will help you improve cancer support in your business, and reduce your risk of cancer discrimination.

1. Understand and accommodate individual needs



Ask questions to understand what someone needs, as everyone's experience will be very different.

Do they want to continue working, or do they need to take time off? Bear in mind that they may not know this straight away or they may want to do a combination during different stages of their experience.

What support do they need? Discuss their concerns and how you can make things any easier for them.

2. Communicate regularly

Do they want to keep in touch if they take time off work? Some people may wish to be kept updated to help them feel involved, as well as providing a welcome distraction, but others may want space. It's best not to assume, and ask if they would like to keep in contact during any periods of time off work.

How often would they like to be contacted? Would they prefer to catch up over coffee, or a quick text? Be prepared to be flexible as their needs will change over time.

Do they want their colleagues to know? It's their decision if they would like to keep their diagnosis confidential, so find out if and how they would like their colleagues to be informed.



3. Talk about cancer at work openly



A good way to create an open culture is to celebrate cancer awareness days.

These are timely opportunities to raise awareness of symptoms to get checked and show that your organisation isn't afraid to talk about cancer so people feel able to seek help when they need it.

Do your employees know who they can talk to about cancer at work? Let your employees know who they should speak to if they're worried about cancer, and where they can find information about support at work.

4. Make training and guidance available to managers

Managers provide crucial support at work for someone impacted by cancer, but there's a lot to consider so it can be tough for them to know the right things to do. They play a key role in making reasonable adjustments, having sensitive conversations about cancer, and supporting other colleagues affected by the news.



Offering training and guidance for managers will help them to support their team legally and sensitively – and foster a positive company culture.

Providing line managers with the right support and training to help them make reasonable adjustments, reduces your risk of discrimination, ensuring cancer patients get the right assistance when working.

5. Introduce cancer-friendly policies



Create a simple checklist of the policies you have that support people through cancer. This will help managers know where to look and what information to provide.

Make sure guidance and information is easy to find. Use the communication tools you have available to send reminders about where employees can seek help or find information.

Create a return-to-work template for cancer patients. This will help people feel supported on their return to work if they take time off during their journey, and will help your team to make any adjustments they might need.



Reframe Cancer help by providing specialist advice and guidance for HR and line managers to support people at work including:

- Making reasonable adjustments
- Return to work planning
- Explaining cancer and the Equality Act 2010
- Raising awareness of cancer symptoms
- Raising awareness of the lifestyle changes that can reduce cancer risk
- Breaking the cancer taboo
- Having sensitive conversations
- Understanding how cancer can impact someone at work
- Helping you review your policies





Our support services

Our tailored short and long-term plans make our support affordable for any business.

Our plans can include:



Access to Reframe's Cancer **Information Hub** – a searchable library of information for patients, line managers and HR teams.



Scheduled calls when needed – with a Cancer Nurse Specialist or Cancer Support Manager.



Dedicated support team **assigned to each patient**.



2 years of support per patient.



Specialised support on managing and returning to work – for patients, and employers.



Access to our **Patient Portal 24/7** for online cancer support for patients, and employers.



Contact us to discuss how we can support your business



Call us on **0207 965 0286** or send us an email at: enquiries@reframe.co.uk



For more information visit: www.reframe.co.uk

About Reframe Cancer

We provide **leading cancer support**, providing ongoing assistance for your business and people.

Our Cancer Nurse Specialists are on hand to help you meet your legal responsibilities, navigate cancer sensitively and deliver comprehensive patient care to enhance your well-being package at an affordable cost.

What we do



Employee support

Clinical, emotional, financial, and practical support at all stages of the cancer pathway – from pre-diagnosis to post-treatment.



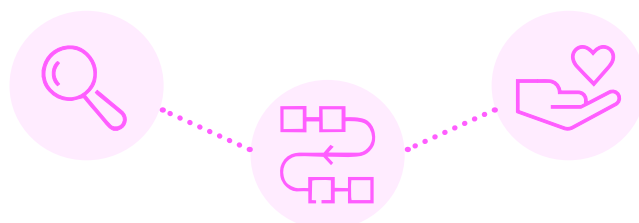
Employer guidance

Specialist advice and guidance for HR and line managers to support people impacted by cancer at work and make effective adjustments that help people reduce time off work.



Cancer awareness and prevention

Giving all employees access to information to make informed decisions about their health.





<reframe>
Cancer

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