



My Work Colleague has Cancer

The Swiss Cancer League's Guide for Work Colleagues
Supporting the Return to the Everyday Work Life



Providing Support for the Return to Everyday Work Life

Each Type of Cancer is Unique

There isn't just ONE TYPE of cancer. Each person reacts individually to the disease and deals with the situation in a very personal way.

What Work Colleagues Need to Know

Cancer leaves its mark. The physical and emotional constitutions have changed. Many cancer survivors face fatigue and concentration problems. The affected person is no longer as resilient as before.

Colleagues Play a Key Role

Through careful and conscious accompaniment of the affected person, you shall have a decisive influence on the working environment and the reintegration process.

Your supervisor or manager, your team and the human resources department shall support you in this challenging time

Diagnosis and Announcing the Disease to the Employer

« I am afraid about my colleagues' reactions when I announce my illness to my employer. I have a guilty conscience because I'm imposing more work on my colleagues. I want security and support, and need someone to listen to me. » Ariane S., Cancer Survivor*

Checklist for Colleagues (Phase 1)

- I acknowledge my own reactions and uncertainties at the time. If necessary, I consult with the human resources department.
- I endeavour to maintain an empathetic attitude. I offer my support and am willing to listen.
- I respect the affected person's communication needs. At the same time, I respect their privacy.

Treatment of the Disease

« During my absence, I am glad to be contacted and that you continue to invite me to events or meetings. If I continue working, I need understanding from others, but would still like to be treated like everyone else. »

Carlos M., Cancer Survivor*

Checklist for Colleagues (Phase 2)

- If the affected person wishes, I ask about their health. I pay attention to what the person says and keep in contact in a low-keyed manner, depending on the relationship with the person and my own discretion.
- I talk to my team of colleagues in order to prevent that they feel pressured in any way. I let the affected person know that they are recognized as a member of the team. For example, I invite the affected person to events outside of work.
- If the affected person continues to work, I pay special attention to maintaining a good balance between empathetic and everyday work attitude. I offer my support and listen to them. However, it is also up to them to understand that they are also treated like everyone else.

Reintegration into Employment

« During my reintegration, I would like to know that my colleagues have an understanding of my situation. In order to return to normal, I would like to be treated like everyone else. My colleagues' help is most welcome, especially in helping me to newly learn certain tasks. » Alice F., Cancer Survivor*

Checklist for Colleagues (Phase 3)

- I do not blame the affected person because of their low or reduced workload.
- I offer my support to the person in re-learning certain processes.
- I am aware that a return to work does not mean an end to the person's illness or treatment.
- I pay attention to keeping a real balance between being especially empathetic and everyday interaction. The colleague needs my support. At the same time, the affected person would like to be treated the same as all other members of the work team.



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Support provided via:

Cancer Hotline



Free telephone hotline (Mo–Fr, from 9 am to 7 pm, English, German, French, Italian)

0800 11 88 11



Your Cantonal Cancer League

Presented by Your Cancer League