

Managing Social and Work Challenges



Social Challenges

The diagnosis of cancer can cause most, if not all, people to undergo significant adjustments in managing relationships with their friends, family and co-workers. Some may find it difficult to relate to people around them, for fear of being treated differently. Many find themselves having to

depend on their family members and friends during the treatment and recovery periods – and this may be particularly difficult for those who have been physically and/or emotionally independent all their lives. This period of adjustment can cause much frustration and anxiety for everyone.

Work Challenges



Besides relationship adjustments, you may also worry about whether you will be able to continue working during or after treatment. Cancer treatment can be costly, and you may have to think about whether you can afford the medical bills and support your family financially if you stop working. Other work-related struggles or problems you may encounter can include:

- Having to go on extended leave or stop work due to treatment side effects and/or the need to relieve yourself from taking added physical and mental stress
- Having to take time off frequently for treatment or medical appointments
- Telling your employers and co-workers about your diagnosis
- Poorer concentration and memory affecting work productivity
- Negative emotions (e.g. fears, worries) impacting on your work life
- Difficulties in finding re-employment after treatment ends

What you need to look out for

Everyone copes with problems differently, but you may want to approach your healthcare team for advice if you experience any of the following:

- Feeling isolated and lonely at your workplace and/or at home
- Feeling overwhelmed by work demands
- Finding that your work environment is not supportive of your medical needs
- Having difficulty adjusting to changes brought about by cancer and its treatment

What you can do

Although relationships and work can be challenging to manage, they often play an integral part in the journey of survivorship after cancer. Wholesome relationships with family and friends help survivors better manage the many challenges that cancer brings e.g. physical, psychological and socio-economic, and are key to the happiness and quality of life of many. Work (if possible), can similarly be beneficial to survivors, beyond the financial aspects. It provides an avenue for survivors to maintain or improve their skills and social interactions, as well as meaningfully contribute back to society.

Here are some tips to help you better manage your social and work life after a cancer diagnosis:

<p>Coping with adjustments at home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give yourself and your family time to adjust to the changes cancer brings• Have open communications about what you can or cannot do, so that others will know what to expect of you	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't expect adjustments to be immediate• Don't feel pressurized to do certain things (e.g. keeping the house in perfect order) because you always did so in the past
<p>Coping with adjustments to social interactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Value relationships. Small, everyday gestures like showing gratitude for your loved ones can show them that you care and appreciate their support• Be open and honest with your loved ones. Share your feelings so that you can decide on how best to support one another• Your loved ones may want to help but do not know how or what they can do. Preparing a detailed list of tasks that you need help in may be useful for them to understand more about your needs and what they can do to help• Expect some relationships to change. Different people may view cancer differently; some may respond to your diagnosis in a way that can be hard for you to understand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't let cancer and its treatment occupy all your thoughts. Take time to connect with your loved ones• Don't force yourself to talk about things if you are not ready. Let your family and friends know you need more time

Coping with adjustments at work

- Share your struggles with work colleagues whom you trust, if you are comfortable with it. They can be great sources of support
- Be open with your supervisor. Let him / her know if you are unable to cope with work demands. Find out if you can work from home, as it may be less strenuous for you especially during the treatment period
- Plan your treatments late in the day or a day before weekend so that you can have enough time to recover
- Delegate other responsibilities (e.g. household chores) so that you can have more time to rest and preserve more energy for work

- Don't keep silent about your struggles at work
- Don't be embarrassed or afraid to voice out your struggles at work with supervisors or fellow colleagues
- Don't overload yourself with work on top of your recovery from cancer

Going back to work

- Consider working part-time first to get back your momentum
- Take into account whether possible side effects of medications you are on can affect what you are expected to do
- Attend workshops or seminars to refresh your skills and update your knowledge if needed
- Pace yourself with work demands. Ask for a change in responsibilities if your job is physically demanding
- Set alarms or reminders if you have difficulties concentrating

When to call your cancer care team

Please inform your doctor or nurse if you are distressed with any of the issues stated above. If you are a patient with NCCS, you may also call **+65 6306 1777** or **+65 6436 8088** to book an appointment to speak to an NCCS medical social worker/ clinical psychologist. Do note that you

should not be refused employment due to your illness. If you think you are being treated unfairly, you may contact Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) for advice. Read more about returning to work after you have completed treatment [here](#).

Useful Resource:

- [Cancer and Careers](#)

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