

Taking Time Off Work for Treatment

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Some people decide to take time off from their jobs in order to better concentrate on their breast cancer treatment. Finances may become a concern. However, there are ways to take the time off that you need and still maintain your job and financial security.

- **Short-term and long-term disability programs** provide a percentage of your income in the event of an injury or illness that prevents you from working. Short-term disability may be granted by the state or by employers for a set period of time, usually 3 to 6 months. When short-term disability expires, long-term disability may be approved by the federal government or your employer. Long-term disability is for employees looking to take off an extended amount of time from work or take time off indefinitely. If your company does not include a short-term disability plan as part of a benefits package, you may purchase a disability insurance policy from an insurance agent or a financial planner. Talk to your human resources department about what your company offers and to find out if you are eligible.
- **The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)** allows you to take up to 12 weeks unpaid leave to heal from a serious health condition while keeping any benefits you may have and maintaining your position with the company. However, the FMLA only covers companies that employ 50 or more people. Also, you must be a full-time employee and must be with the company for at least a year.

If you plan to take time off from work, there are things you can try to make your return a little easier. Talk to your supervisor about having co-workers take on some of your workload. One of your co-workers could even act as a “go-to” person, answering questions or making decisions for you in your absence. An easy-to-use filing system, such as color-coding, could be helpful for others who need to locate important paperwork.

After taking time off from work, think about whether the schedule you had will still work for you, or if changes need to be made. Do you want to jump in headfirst and go back to work full-time? Or do you want to take it a little slower and ease your way in with a part-time schedule? Talk to your supervisor about any changes you need to make in your work hours

as you recover. If working a full-time schedule is difficult but you need to stay full-time to keep your health insurance, talk to your boss about taking rests or breaks during the work day as you recover from treatment.

Some people may find that getting back to work is a bigger adjustment than they anticipated. There are things you can try to make the transition a little easier. Consider making your work space a little more comfortable. You could:

- **Hang some inspirational pictures or quotations**, if you have an office or a personal area.
- **Decorate with photos** of family and friends, and bring in live plants to give a more comfortable, "homey" feel.
- **Try relaxation techniques** such as taking slow, deep breaths or using guided imagery or visualization techniques.
- **Listen to soothing music or meditation CDs**, if you have a CD player at work. If you find yourself becoming tense at work, you might find that meditation sounds have a calming effect.