

Telling Your Boss and Co-Workers About Your Breast Cancer Diagnosis

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The first question you may want to ask yourself when thinking about talking to your boss or coworkers about your breast cancer diagnosis is “Should I tell?” You don’t have to tell anyone at work, unless it is apparent that your diagnosis or treatment will interfere with your ability to work or your work schedule. Keep in mind that if you decide not to discuss your health at work, some questions may be raised if your productivity level is affected, or if you miss a lot of time at work due to treatment appointments.

You might decide to just tell some people — your supervisor, your closest colleagues, or someone with whom you share responsibilities. Or, you could decide to tell everything to everyone, depending on how comfortable you feel. So how do you tell them, and what do you tell them? Keep in mind that people may react differently; you may receive great amounts of support from some coworkers, while others might not be as comfortable with the conversation.

Your comfort is the most important, so do what feels right for you. Here are some things you might want to try to make the discussion a little easier:

- **Have the conversation in a comfortable, yet private area.**
- **Talk to your co-workers in smaller groups** of one to three people, to make conversation easier.
- **Assure your team of your commitment to your job.** Explain that you will do everything in your power to do the best job you can. For example, you can ask someone to handle your duties when you’re not at work and you’ll follow up when you return.
- **Don’t be afraid to ask your co-workers for help and understanding.** Explain that you may need some flexibility in your schedule and support in some projects.
- **Explain that you will keep everyone posted on your health as needed.** Allow coworkers to ask some questions about your situation — most

likely, they care and want to help. At the same time, if they seem to be asking too many questions, let them know that you appreciate their concern, but that you'd like to focus on work.

- **Discuss a possible change in your appearance.** You may experience hair loss, for example, if you'll be having chemotherapy treatments.