

Workplace Adjustments

Cancer in the Workplace Workshop

Workplace adjustments or workplace modifications are based on an employee's need and their specific work environment. What is reasonable for one employee may not be reasonable for another.

It is important for an employee to reflect on their illness and level of function. Then consider the impact on their work performance and the type of adjustments and modifications that might make the job easier and safer for them to do. A manager / supervisor should be considering the workplace adjustments that are available and reasonable for them to accommodate.

Together the employee and manager / supervisor should agree on the adjustments and modifications and put this in the return-to-work plan to help the employee resume work or stay at work.

Workplace Adjustments and Modifications for Employees affected by Cancer

Working Hours and Breaks

Time of Work: Negotiate a later start time if there are difficulties getting started in the morning or leave early if there is fatigue in the afternoon.

Reduce hours of work: Start on a reduced number of days/hours per week, reduce number of hours per day, break up the workdays, plan for a gradual build-up of hours.

Know 'best time' of the day: This may depend on the treatment regime and side effects of radiation or chemotherapy. Set work hours around 'being at your best'. Split up shifts. Move from night shift to day shifts.

Breaks: Negotiate work breaks if pain or fatigue become an issue.

Appointments: Flexible work hours may be needed to accommodate attendance at treatment and medical appointments.

Work Duties and Tasks

Overall Duties: Negotiate what duties and tasks will be performed within the reduced hours worked. Where possible, swap duties with other team members. Ensure the time when 'you are at your best' correlates with the most important tasks.

Work Output: Agree on performance targets and quality of work expectations taking into account the effect of reduced hours, breaks and fatigue.

Specific Duties: If reduced energy or capacity makes physical tasks (e.g. lifting, driving) difficult, negotiate how others in the team might help with this. Or consider what equipment might be useful. If new tasks are introduced, make sure training is demonstrated and in written form.

Workplace Equipment

Workstation: Changes to the workspace such as a more suitable chair, footrest, height-adjustable desk or counter, arm supports, mouse pad, alternate mouse, additional screen.

Technology: Providing new technology, such as voice-activated software, telephone headsets, a hearing loop or screen-reading software.

Cognitive Strategies

Attention and Concentration: Dedicate time to focus on a specific task. Turn off email, phone and messaging notifications. Find a quiet place to work or put on headphones and listen to calming music. Break up large tasks into smaller achievable steps. Have a break every now and then. After a set time on one task, move to a totally different task next.

Memory: Keep a diary or set appointment reminders on phone. Carry a small notepad or download an app to your phone so you can jot down things you need to remember. Refer to project plans, meeting minutes and other documents to jog your memory.

Planning and organisation: Allocate time to planning at the start of each day. Write to-do lists or create a mind or flow chart of how parts of the tasks fit together. Complete tasks one at a time rather than multitasking. Plan activities so you do things that require more concentration when you are more alert. If possible, let calls go to voicemail and return them when you've had time to prepare your response. Negotiate timeframes and deadline.

Task Completion: Create to-do lists to help keep track of the things you need to achieve. Have a buddy or accountability partner for prompting, review progress, problem solve issues and keep on track. Have regular check-ins with managers where progress and concerns are discussed - document points of discussion and action plan for follow up.

Work Environment

Work from home: This allows reduced travel time, balance of appointments and suitable environment for breaking up the day with rests. This may need to be an option if employees have a suppressed immune system during chemotherapy treatment.

Alternate workstation/office/location: If fatigue, breathlessness or other side effects are impacting mobility at normal work location, consider an alternate workstation or office on level of the building without stairs or building in a different suburb.

Workstation: Keep workspaces clean, especially if there is desk sharing. Wipe down your phone, keyboard, desk, and mouse regularly. Negotiate if you can be allocated the same workstation each day. Wipe over company cars, clean the steering wheel, handles and radio console.

Facilities and amenities: Cancer and treatment side effects may require frequent use of the toilet, consider a workstation/office as close to the amenities as possible. Employees with fatigue could bring a small pillow to work and find a quiet place to rest. If this isn't possible, take a short walk and sit outside for fresh air.

Travel Arrangements

Parking: Allocate parking space close to building entry/exit. Check eligibility for a disability parking permit.

Transport: If public transport isn't an option (e.g. fatigue, low immunity) drive to work or see if getting a lift with a colleague is possible. Wear a mask when traveling with others.