

Sharing the News at Work

Sharing the news with co-workers that you have cancer is a deeply personal decision. How open you are will depend on many factors, including the type of environment you work in, your relationships with your co-workers, and your personality. Truthfully, you don't have to tell anyone.

But if you do, you might be surprised by your colleagues' understanding and compassion. It could also help clear the air and remove some of the awkwardness each of you may be feeling, especially if you've been absent from work for awhile or have suddenly started wearing a wig.

Some co-workers may approach you and want to talk about your illness; others may avoid you because they feel uncomfortable talking about your illness. Or, they may think that they are invading your privacy and don't want to intrude on something so personal. Remember, everyone's reaction will be different.

Here are a few tips and suggestions for handling various situations:

- If you want your co-workers to know about your cancer, but don't want to be in the position of having to talk about your illness on a regular basis, consider saying something like this once, "I wanted you to know that I am receiving treatment for cancer. But I'm really not comfortable talking about it; that's just the way I find I cope best. I appreciate your support and your thinking about me."
- If, on the other hand, you draw comfort and inspiration from talking with your co-workers about your condition, let them know. Thank them for their words of encouragement and signal to them that you're OK with talking about your illness. Consider using a little humor to put them at ease. Remember, many people want to be supportive but find it difficult to often find the "right" words to say.