

Before returning to work: Plan for a gradual return but be flexible.

In our third instalment of the cancer journey we are looking at how you prepare to return to work after treatment.

You may really want to go back to work – most of us do – but the thought of how you will manage this, especially if you have a physically or emotionally demanding job can be quite stressful and debilitating. It's at this stage too that the reality of what you have been through hits home, that you realise you will soon be leaving the protective bubble the doctors have built around you.

Many people wonder how they will cope with all the demands of work especially if they have permanent or semi-permanent physical problems – stomach, bowel, speech, physical changes – to deal with as well. Friends and family may be celebrating the fact that your treatment has finished but you may feel a sense of anti-climax, fear and anxiety. In some cases, medication can be a necessary and useful temporary intervention to get through this period but it is also important to remember that 1) these feelings are understandable and normal and you are not going mad, or damaged, or to quote one unhelpful employer “not the person you used to be” 2) you are entitled to adjustments for as long as is reasonably necessary to ease you back into work.

Your recovery doesn't end as soon as you return to work- it's the next phase of recovery; you just need to give yourself time to readjust.

Next week, we'll be looking at the continuing process of your recovery from cancer treatment and how to manage work.