

Keeping up with your education

Having cancer doesn't mean you have to give up school or college. Some treatments may only require you to miss a couple of classes once a week. Others may be more time-consuming and mean you can only attend school or college occasionally.

Going into school or college as much as you can doesn't only help you keep up with your education. It also lets you stay in touch with what your friends are doing and may give you a sense of normality. This information sheet provides some tips to help you keep up with both your work and your friendships from school or college.

While you're in hospital and at home

If you're in hospital for a while, encourage your school or college friends to stay in touch with you regularly by email, text and phone. They also may be able to visit you, if you feel up to it.

Your hospital teacher, or one of the team of people caring for you, will arrange with your class teacher or head of year to plan and provide work for you to do while you're in hospital or at home. Staff from your school or college can also arrange to deliver work and textbooks to you, and for completed work to be returned to your teacher for marking.

If you're in compulsory education, but not well enough to go to school or college, you should be able to get home tuition. Depending on where you live you may be offered online learning. You or your parent, carer, social worker or youth support worker can contact your local authority for more information about this.

If you go to an independent school, you will need to ask your head of learning support whether home tuition is available to you.

Your hospital teachers or home tutors will help you with your coursework. They will be sensitive to how you are feeling, and encourage you to do only as much as you can manage.

While you are in hospital, let your teacher know if you want anyone at school or college to be told about your cancer. You may feel that you don't want to share this information with everyone. However, if people are aware, it can help avoid awkward situations such as being told by a teacher to take off your baseball cap during a lesson.

Your social worker, youth support worker or nurse or nurse may also be able to talk to your teachers about what you are going through and how they can support you.

Some young people find that having cancer makes them want or need to rethink their future. As a result, you may decide to make some changes to the courses you are taking. Your teachers at school or college will probably know you best and may be able to give you the support and advice you need to make these decisions. However, if you'd prefer to speak to someone outside school, your social worker, youth development worker or nurse will be happy to talk things through with you.

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Returning to school or college

It's natural to feel anxious about going back to school or college – particularly if you have been off for some time. You could be feeling awkward and ill-at-ease about seeing your friends again, and not sure whether you'll be able to keep up with work. You may feel that you look or feel different, and be unsure how people will react to this.

School or college can sometimes feel very noisy and overpowering when you're used to being alone at home, or in a quiet hospital ward. You may worry that you won't be able to concentrate on schoolwork or cope in these surroundings.

All this can affect your confidence, so it's a good idea to talk to one of your health professionals, or your social worker or youth development worker who can help you find the best way to deal with being back at school.

What your school or college can do to help make it easier for you to return

A special educational needs coordinator, inclusion/learning support manager, head of learning support, your form tutor/head of year, or an outreach nurse may liaise between your school and the hospital to arrange a 'return to school' plan for you. The people involved will depend on your age, where you live, and whether you go to a state or independent school.

Your form teacher will be up-to-date with your progress, as they will have been coordinating the work you have been doing at home or in hospital. Your school may also have learning mentors who can support you and talk to other people on your behalf.

When you are ready to return to school or college, your teachers, learning mentors, or a member of support staff can make the arrangements that will help you adjust to life back at school or college more easily. Talk to them about what you need. For example:

- The possibility of going back part-time, or for a few lessons each week, while continuing to get help at home if you don't feel ready to go back full-time just yet
- One-to-one support to help you get back up to speed with your studies
- Easy access to classrooms, toilets, the dining room and break areas
- Flexibility if you need to make extra trips to the toilet, eat snacks to keep your energy levels up, or stay indoors during breaks or lunch hours
- Help getting from one classroom to another or permission to leave a class early to get to the next one
- Help with taking notes if fatigue or stamina is an issue, for example having a notetaker or using digital recorders
- Receiving information in an alternative format, for example electronically.
- Flexibility about coursework and homework deadlines, particularly if you're still taking time off for treatment.

Teachers should also keep an eye out for any signs of bullying, rumours or discrimination.

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Taking exams

If you are due to take exams, the special educational needs coordinator, inclusion/learning, or head of learning support can liaise with the exams officer to arrange any help you may need.

You may be able to get special 'access arrangements', which are changes to the way you take an exam. Some examples are:

- 25% extra time allowance
- Use of a laptop or specialist equipment, if necessary
- Someone else to read or write for you
- Taking the exam in a separate room, away from other candidates
- Rest breaks if you need them.

If you are unwell during the exam period and this affects your performance, your GP or consultant may be able to give you a 'letter of special consideration'. The exam board will then decide if it is possible to adjust your marks to take your situation into account.

What you can do to make returning easier

- Try to keep going to school or college as often as you can during your treatment. You might want to go in for short periods, specific lessons or even break time at first. Speak to your teacher or a member of the team caring for you about what is possible
- Stay in touch with your friends throughout your treatment, so they can let you know what is happening socially and in classes
- Keep up with your courses as much as you can – but don't exhaust yourself. It's more important to concentrate on getting well

- Let your friends and teachers know how your treatment is going and how your health is, so they know what to expect when you come back to school
- Let your school or college know in advance how you want to be treated, whether you will need special arrangements, and whether you want them to tell people about your cancer
- On your first day back after taking some time off, you might like to arrange to meet some friends before school and arrive with them, to help you feel more confident
- If you find being back at school confusing, exhausting or overwhelming, try not to panic or worry. Take things at your own pace and do what you can when you can
- If you are having any problems, don't keep them to yourself. Talk to your teachers, family, partner or friends and tell them what you need.

If you or your teachers would like to know more about how other young people with cancer have found going back to school, you might want to take a look at the *Keeping up* films on the CLIC Sargent website. Your social worker or youth support worker can also provide you with copies of these.

If you need specialist advice, SKILL offers a range of online information about post-16 education, training and employment in England, for young people who have additional support needs. They also provide a helpline and email advice. Visit www.disabilityalliance.org/skill.htm or call the helpline on **0800 328 5050**. If you are in Scotland, visit Lead Scotland's website at www.lead.org.uk. Your social worker or youth support worker can also help you access specialist advice on education issues.



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Talking to friends and classmates

People at school may have all kinds of questions about your cancer and treatment. You may be happy to chat and answer them, or you may not want to.

Our *Talking to friends* information sheet offers tips and suggestions for how to deal with friends, while our 'Answering your questions about your friend's illness' information sheet has been written specifically for them. Just download and print off as many as you need. Giving copies to friends and classmates may help them understand your experience.

If people at your school want to find out how they can support CLIC Sargent and other young people with cancer, there is more information on our website at www.clicsargent.org.uk

Do you have more questions, or need some help?

CLIC Sargent has been working with young people for over 20 years, and we understand what you're going through. Our care professionals include social workers, youth support workers and nurses, who provide clinical, practical and emotional support. Talk to your CLIC Sargent care professional, or call us on **0300 330 0803*** and we'll put you in touch with someone who can help.

You can also visit our website at www.clicsargent.org.uk or email us on info@clicsargent.org.uk

* Calls to 03 numbers are charged in the same way as calls to a geographic (01 or 02) number. Check your phone contract to see how much you pay for this type of call - it may be included in 'inclusive minutes'.

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