

Key practices for a successful, smooth and sustainable return to work



Getting ready to return to work (RTW) can feel different for everyone, and almost always involves an adjustment period. It's a big transition, especially after a disability leave. Some people may feel excited, while others may feel overwhelmed. Planning your RTW step-by-step and ahead of time can be helpful. In this handbook, we'll share key practices to support you to successfully manage your return to work.



The decision to return-to-work

Work itself is healthy, and a well-planned return to work can be an important part of the recovery process. Your RTW date will be based on input from you, your health care providers and your Disability Case Manager.

As part of this process, you'll be asked to reflect on your previous job duties. It's important to identify what you think you can do without aggravating your condition. From there, you can work with your employer to put reasonable accommodations in place. This could include a gradual return to work.

Understand the different roles

Your RTW includes the collaboration between you, your employer and your disability insurance company. Here's an overview of the role that each of you will play once you've finalized your return date.



Your role

This is all about you and your health. You'll want to be an active participant in the RTW process. Talk honestly to your employer and Disability Case Manager about any issues or worries you may have.

- Have a clear conversation with your health care provider and your Disability Case Manager about your needs. While your employer must make reasonable accommodations, you need to communicate what accommodations you may need. These might include changes to your hours, work tasks, or work environment – or additional training. Discuss if a gradual RTW plan, or detailed reintegration plan, would be helpful.
- Let your employer know what (if any) details about your return they can share with your colleagues. While your employer has a duty to keep your information private, there may be details that you genuinely want them to share. This might include any accommodation plans or work limitations.
- Agree on timing for check-ins with your manager to communicate any challenges you may face.



Your employer's role

The main role of your employer is to help ease your transition back to work in the best possible way.

They'll start by:

- checking in with you before you come back to work,
- meeting with you on your first day back, and
- helping you throughout your RTW period, including providing any additional support or resources that you may need over time.

Your employer also has a duty to:

- Respect and protect your privacy regarding the information they can share with your co-workers.
- Make reasonable accommodations for a successful RTW based on the recommendations of your health-care provider.



Your insurer's role

- Your Disability Case Manager will work with you, your health care provider and your employer to create the most effective RTW program adapted to your needs. If you work with a rehabilitation consultant, they'll also be involved. Here's what they'll do:
- Help identify any accommodations you may need, based on an assessment of your medically supported restrictions and limitations.
- Assess your progress during the gradual RTW phase.
- Remain bound by strict confidentiality rules to protect the privacy of your personal health information.



STEP 2

Personalize any needed work accommodations

You want to make sure that accommodations will align to your health needs as part of your recovery. As mentioned, before your RTW, work with your Disability Case Manager and/or rehabilitation consultant and health-care providers to discuss your abilities related to your role. If you're working with your insurer's rehabilitation consultant, they'll also be involved in the discussions. Based on these discussions, your employer may be able to smooth your transition by:

- making your RTW gradual,
- putting modified job duties in place, and/or
- arranging other special accommodations to make returning to work easier.

STEP 3

Pre-return: work out key details

Being prepared for your return is important. It will help increase your confidence, manage stress or anxiety, and ease the transition. Once your first day back and any accommodations are finalized, start with small steps:

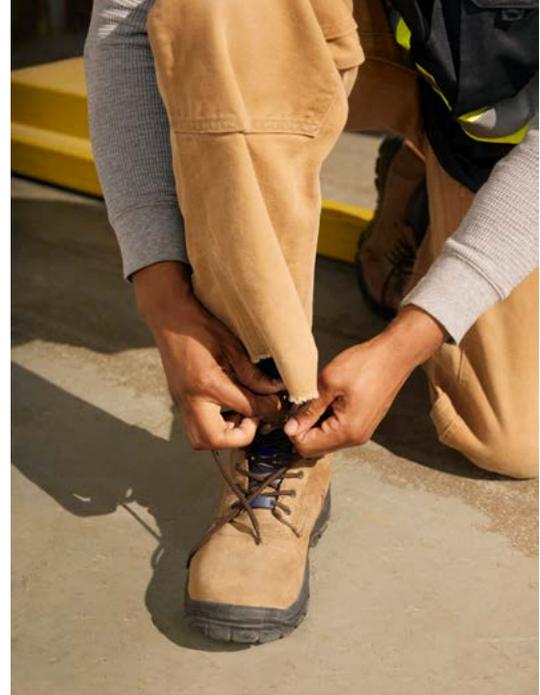
- Confirm with your manager your work plan 1 to 2 weeks before your return date. You can re-confirm that your accommodations are in place.
- During this pre-return period, begin to establish the morning (or other) pre-work routine you'll have when you return. This will give you time to adjust to the change.
- Finalize how you'll coordinate your return with other life and household tasks (such as getting kids to school, or meal preparations).
- Confirm with your manager what they can share with your co-workers about your absence and return.
- Ensure any workplace equipment you need (such as safety gear, uniforms, security cards, computers, IDs, and passwords) is in place.
- Ensure you have access to ongoing needed treatments.

STEP 4

Prepare for your first day back to work

You may be excited or anxious as you're not sure what to expect on your big day. Everyone's different and your feelings are valid, so be kind to yourself. Meet with your manager at the earliest time to ensure you have everything you need to start on your first day.

- Meet with your manager virtually or in person. Use this time to review your work tasks, responsibilities and your RTW schedule before you begin.
- Ask your manager to update you on any changes that may have happened during your absence. They can also update you on any upcoming events you should be aware of.



Unionized employees

If you're a member of a union, your union representative(s) may be involved in the accommodations process.



STEP 5

Your first week back to work

It may take time to ease into your new routine. There are steps you can take to help address any challenges that may come up. You're not alone, and your manager can help.

- Bring any issues to your manager's or Human Resources' attention so they can be addressed. This includes any training that you may need to help you get back on track. New processes, software, regulations, or equipment may have been introduced during your absence.
- Ask your manager if there are any other resources available you can use or reach out to if needed.

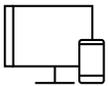
STEP 6

Prioritize your health

As you move back to your work routine, it's important to appreciate the impact the transition may have on you. Depending on how long you were on leave, there can be a lot to catch up on. You're also now balancing work and personal responsibilities. This in itself can be stressful.

As you begin to reintegrate, make self-care a priority. Take the rest you need to recharge and stay healthy. Make time to continue with any recommended health treatments.

Stay positive about your efforts to return to work and health. Ask your employer about supports available to you. Some of these may include:



Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP)



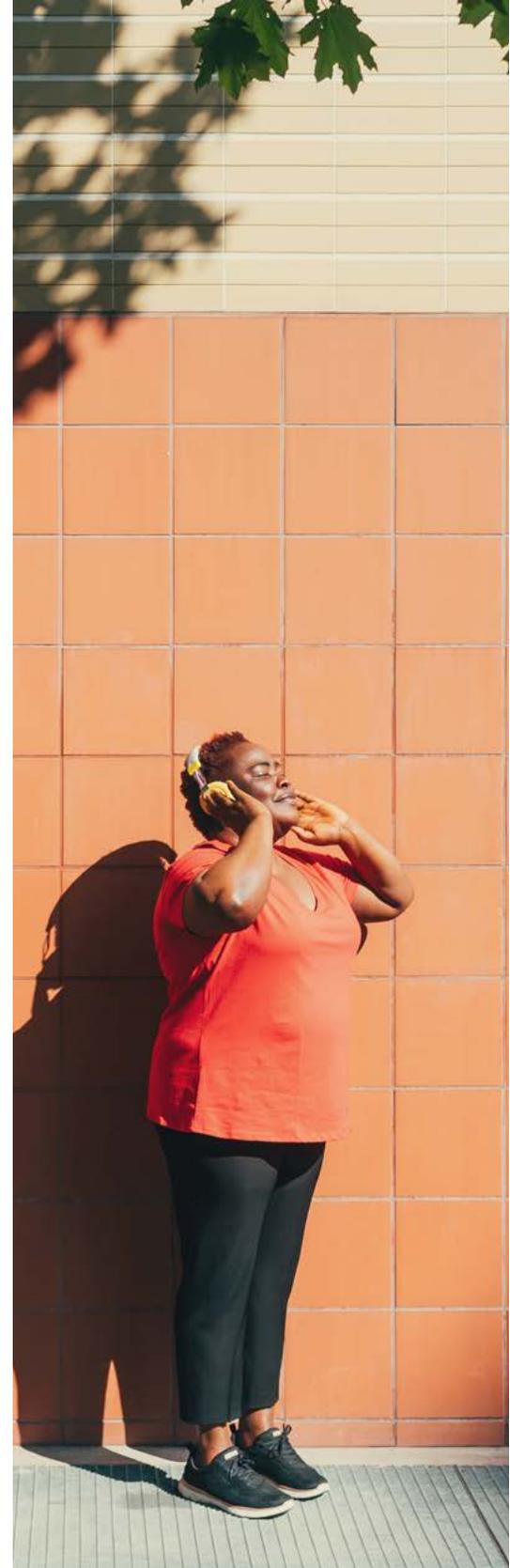
Virtual care resources



Ongoing health-care provider visits



Lifestyle interventions (such as changes to diet and exercise) that can have a positive affect on your mental health.



Returning to work after a disability is a significant life event. It can come with many different feelings – and it will take time to get back to your regular self. So be patient and give yourself grace while you adjust to your new routine.

Life's brighter under the sun

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