



Back to work... after an accident

This fact sheet is designed to support you with your return to work after an accident. It offers self-help tips to ensure that your return is as smooth as possible.

If you have been off work for a while you may feel apprehensive about going back. This is understandable. However, with some preparation, and the support of your employer, returning to work can help you on your road to recovery.

Tip: know your limits. Remember, everyone has a different recovery rate – if you are feeling up to it, you don't have to wait for a sick note to expire or until your injury or pain has completely disappeared before returning to work. Talk to your employer about changes that can be made to the way you work so that you are more comfortable.

Talk about work

Keeping in contact with your employer before you return to work is key so that you can plan your return together and minimise your risk from further accidents. Keeping up-to-date with what's going on in work will help you feel less cut off, more in control and better prepared for managing your work load when you do go back.

Make a note of anything you think your employer can do to support you and discuss this with them the next time you speak to them. When it comes to your job you are the expert and will have a good sense of what help or adjustments you might need.

Tip: talk to your GP who will be able to help you plan and support your return to work. If you've had treatment like surgery listen to your body and take advice from your doctor or surgeon about any 'do's and don'ts' in relation to your job.

If you have been given advice or recommendations about work by your doctor remember to keep your employer in the loop, this will help them plan and support your return to work effectively.

Tip: know your limits. You are the best judge of whether you should stay in work or stay at home. Speak to your boss or GP if you are not sure.

On medication?

If you are on medication make sure you know how to take it, how long to take it for and how much to take. Here are a few tips for staying on top of your medication.

- Make sure you complete your course of prescribed medicines. Even if you are feeling better.
- Is there anything you need to avoid whilst on the medication? Some medicines could interfere with your work i.e. operating machinery or driving. If you are unsure speak to your pharmacist. Let your employer know so that they can make adjustments to your job if need be.
- Remember to bring medicines to work.
- Always check the dosage instructions. If you need a trigger to remind you to take medicine whilst at work write it on a post it note, set your mobile alarm or ask a colleague to remind you.
- Some medicines can become less effective if not stored properly – speak to your boss about storing them somewhere safe.



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- Speak to your occupational health department, pharmacist, doctor or nurse immediately if you are concerned about a suspected or unexpected side effect.

Wellbeing for work

When recovering from an accident try doing some simple things to boost your recovery, improve your wellbeing at home and at work and reduce your risk of further accidents.

- Have a health and safety reminder. If your job involves manual handling ensure you are aware of how to lift/push/pull properly and know how to use equipment correctly.

Tip: speak to your health and safety representative about how to minimise your risk of accidents.

- Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables and wholegrain food which are packed with essential vitamins and minerals that will help your body repair and recover. Citrus fruits like kiwis and green leafy vegetables contain vitamin C which is great for the immune system.

Tip: take fruit to work to snack on and start your day with a bowlful of wholegrain cereal.

- Problems with the digestive system can be common after an operation. Eat meals regularly, drink plenty of water and avoid fatty, spicy foods.

Tip: try to drink around 2 litres of water a day (6 to 8 glasses). Fill a bottle to take to work and drink throughout the day.

- If you smoke, now could be a good time to think about quitting. Nicotine damages your immune system and reduces the healing process by encouraging infection and poor circulation.

Tip: talk to your occupational health department about help with quitting smoking or contact your local NHS stop smoking service by calling 0800 169 0 169 and speaking to a specialist adviser.

- Relax – don't push yourself. If you feel under pressure take a step back. Speak to your employer. Getting stressed will hinder not help your recovery. Take regular breaks to help clear your head.

Tip: try this quick deep breathing exercise for instant relaxation. Take a long slow breath in then very slowly breathe out. Really concentrate and repeat as often as you need to. After a few times you should begin to feel more relaxed.

- Keep as active as possible. Staying active can help with your recovery, boost your immune system and improve your circulation. Short bursts of activity can be very effective and will gradually help you to improve or regain overall fitness. If you've any doubts about your health and ability to exercise speak to your practice nurse or GP. If you have been prescribed specific exercises for your particular injury make sure that you carry on with these when you go back to work. If you need to do them during working hours speak to your boss about fitting them in to your working routine.

Tip: go for a walk round the block during breaks or at lunch time, do what you can manage, short bursts of activity can be effective too.



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- Don't get stuck. Staying stuck in the same position for big chunks of time can aggravate any existing injuries.

Tip: Stretch and shift. Do this as often as you can to stop injuries from seizing up. Write it on a post it note and stick it where you'll see it – or set an alarm on your mobile phone as a reminder to keep stretching and shifting your position.

- Finally – sleep well. Getting quality sleep will help you get on track and feel refreshed. Most importantly it helps your body repair and recover.

Tip: try to get seven hours of sleep a night. If you are having problems sleeping try to relax as much as possible before bed - have a warm relaxing bath, a cup of camomile tea or listen to some soothing music.

SOS

If you feel like you are struggling to cope with your return to work don't hesitate to speak to your manager or occupational health service. It is important to work together to find solutions to make your return to work as easy as possible.

Don't struggle on – highlight any problems with your employer as soon as possible.

Remember, for most people return to work promotes recovery, helps with rehabilitation and improves physical and mental well-being.

More information

For more information on health and safety at work and what to do if you have had an accident visit the **Health and Safety Executive** website at www.hse.gov.uk or **Directgov** website at www.direct.gov.uk

This fact sheet contains general information produced by DPP: Developing Patient Partnerships which can be used as the first step to help you decide the best course of action to take when you or your family are not well. In the absence of any examination it is not possible to reliably diagnose and treat a medical condition. Diagnosis can only be carried out by a suitably qualified health professional after a consultation. The advice and guidance in the leaflet is the responsibility of DPP.

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