

# Off work sick and worried about your job?

Steps you can take to help your return to work



This leaflet contains practical advice for you if you are off work sick and worried about losing your job, or you are afraid that going back to work now will be bad for your health. It suggests actions you can take yourself to help you return to work safely, as soon as possible. It also gives information about how your employer can help you and where you can get more advice.





### **Did you know?**

- Starting everyday activities again, like going to work, will help you feel better.
- Any remaining pain or discomfort you feel can often be managed with the right adjustments at work.
- Work, when well managed, is good for your health, but staying off work can make you feel worse.

### **Talk to your employer while you are off work**

Keep in touch with your employer about your sickness. Tell them about any advice your doctor has given you, like how long you may be off work. Ask for news from work to help you feel a part of what's going on. If you don't want to speak to your manager or supervisor, your trade union or other employee representatives or a workmate may be able to act as a go-between.

If there are other problems stopping you from returning, talk to your employer about them. They may be able to help.

Remember, if you do not contact your employer, they will have to make decisions about you without knowing your needs.

## **Your employer may have rules and procedures that you are required to follow when you are off work sick.**

If your employer has an occupational health nurse or doctor, contact them about what help you might need to return to work. They will not discuss your health without your consent. They do have a duty to inform your employer about any reasonable adjustments you need if you are disabled or if your health and safety is at risk.



### **Talk to your doctor about your work**

Tell your doctor about your job and ask about:

- going back to work;
- any work tasks that need adjusting on a temporary or permanent basis to allow you to return;
- any side effects of treatments or medications that could affect your work.

If you feel happy to do so, you can ask your employer to write to your doctor about your job and adjustments needed to help you return. Your doctor will not discuss your health without your consent.

### **Your employer can help you while you are off work**

Staying in touch with your employer will help you both to plan your return to work. Talk to them about what they might be able to do to help you.

Actions they can take include:

- taking advice from you, your manager or supervisor and your trade union or other employee representatives;
- using this advice to put together a return to work plan setting out any adjustments to your job or changes to health and safety control measures before you return;
- making sure everyone involved agrees the plan.

Here are some examples of adjustments your employer may be able to make:

- starting you back on shorter hours, then increasing them within an agreed timescale;
- adapting or changing the equipment you use at work to make it safe and comfortable;
- starting you with a reduced workload or work at a slower pace and then building it up to normal;

- adapting your job by replacing or reallocating tasks on a temporary or renewable basis.

Make sure you understand the effect of such adjustments on your pay.

Your employer needs to decide whether existing health and safety control measures will protect your health and safety after you return to work. If changes are needed, your employer has a duty to consult your trade union safety representatives or elected representatives of employee safety about their effect on your health and safety and other employees affected by the changes. Your employer cannot discuss your personal or health details without your consent.

Sometimes you or your employer may need professional or specialist advice (see the end of this leaflet). If you are disabled, you can apply to your nearest Jobcentre Plus for help. A Disability Employment Adviser will see whether the Access to Work (AtW) Scheme can help you and your employer.



## Returning to work

- If you have been off work for a long time, an informal visit during lunchtime or coffee breaks can help you catch up.
- Your employer or manager will want to welcome you back and check how you are feeling. Use this opportunity to discuss your return to work plan and any problems you have.
- Help your employer or manager to look at your progress and to make any changes needed to your return to work plan.

- The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 ensures that everyone at work is entitled to the protection of their health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate employees who are or have become disabled, as defined by the Act. The fact that a person has a disability does not mean that they represent an additional risk to health and safety.
- Employees and workers have rights at work under employment law.

These are not intended as authoritative statements of the law and for legal advice you should refer to the sources at the end of this leaflet.

## Where can you and your employer get more information?

*Managing sickness absence and return to work: An employer's and manager's guide* HSG249 HSE Books 2004 ISBN 0 7176 2882 5

Help and advice can also be found at [www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence](http://www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence)

You can get access to public computers and the internet by using UK online centres and the People's Network in England and Wales and Public Internet Access Points in Scotland. For your nearest UK online centre or Public Internet Access Point phone 0800 77 1234. For your nearest People's Network Centre contact your local library.

### Health and safety advice

Health and Safety Executive (HSE): [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)  
Infoline: 08701 545500

### Employment and state benefits advice

Jobcentre Plus: [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)  
See the Yellow Pages for your local Jobcentre Plus.

### Personal health advice

NHS Direct: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)  
(England and Wales)  
Tel: 0845 46 47

NHS24: [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)  
(Scotland)  
Tel: 08454 24 24 24

### Disability rights advice

Disability Rights Commission (DRC): [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)  
Helpline: 08457 622 633

### Rights at work advice

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS): [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)  
Helpline: 08457 474 747

Trades Union Congress (TUC): [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 7636 4030

### Consumer and welfare advice

Citizens Advice Bureau advice guide: [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)  
See the Yellow Pages for your local Citizens Advice Bureau

## Further Information

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA  
Tel: 01787 881165  
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Website: [www.hsebooks.co.uk](http://www.hsebooks.co.uk)  
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For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline  
Tel: 08701 545500  
Fax: 02920 859260  
e-mail: [hseinformationservices@natbrit.com](mailto:hseinformationservices@natbrit.com) or write to  
HSE Information Services,  
Caerphilly Business Park,  
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