Returning to an Existing Job

A Self-Help Guide for those awaiting Occupational Therapy Input



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Introduction

You have been referred to the Community Neuro Rehabilitation Service because you are in employment and may need support to return to your job.

The aim of this manual is to advise what you can do for yourself until we are able to start working with you.

If you have been off sick for a week or longer, you will need to obtain a Fitnote which says you are unfit to work. This can be obtained from your Consultant, GP or Therapist.

As time goes on, you may begin to feel better and want to begin some preparation for returning to work.

The following booklet aims to explain how you can begin to do this.

Please note:

If you are planning to return to work in the near future (within 3 months) and are concerned that you will struggle with this;

or,

if you are at risk of losing your current job because of your health condition;

then please contact our service immediately to discuss this.

CONTACT:

Community Neurological Rehabilitation Team

Our email: communityneurologyservices@nhs.net

Our telephone number: 0113 8555082

What is your work goal?

The first step is to identify your goal with regards to employment.

Examples of work related goals might include:

- *I want to return to my original job and my full time hours within 3 months.*
- *I want to return to my original job but would like to reduce my hours for now.*
- *I want to return to my workplace but need to consider a different role as my original job is too demanding for me currently.*

Write your goal here:

_____

_____

_____



Keeping in touch with your employer

If your goal is return to your original job, it is a good idea to inform your employer of this at your earliest opportunity. This keeps your employer aware of your plans and allows them to identify any support you might need, to achieve this.

We suggest advising your employer of this in writing to provide a paper trail.

An 'example' letter to give to your employer might look like this:

Your Address
and postcode

Your telephone number

Date

Your employer's address:

Barclays Bank
1 Park Row
Leeds
LS1 6GH

Dear (*Your Manager's name),*

As you will know I have recently experienced some medical problems.

I am writing to inform you that with your support I intend to return to my job in the future.

I am currently awaiting rehabilitation to enable me to meet this goal and will be receiving specialist input.

I am happy speak to you with regards to my plans when I am able.

Yours sincerely,

(Your Name)

What does your job involve?

In order to consider if you are able to return to work, it is helpful to identify what this will entail in practice. Use this space to answer the follow questions:

Job title: ……..

How do you get to and from work? ……

Do you have a fitnote (sick note)? Yes / No

Date of expiry: ……..……

What does your job entail? What are your key roles and responsibilities?
(Tip: your job description my help you answer)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

What are your hours and which days do you work? ……...….

How many hours do you work per week? ……

Do you do shift-work or a set pattern? ……..

Are you expected to do regular overtime? (Paid or unpaid) …….

Your health:

How are you at the moment?

In preparing for a return to work, please consider your current difficulties and fill in the section below. Record any examples of problems that you are experiencing.

This will then help you (and your therapist) decide whether or not it is time to start exploring a 'return to work plan'.

Do you have problems with:

Physical (walking, use of your hands / arms, balance, dizziness, pain, sensation)
Thinking skills (concentration, memory, planning, organisation)

Emotions (feeling low, frustrated, irritable, easily angered or anxious? Do you find that you are more tearful or argumentative than you used to be?)
Fatigue (your energy levels, stamina , fitness, do you need to take breaks more often?)
Communication (do you struggle to talk to people or to follow conversations. Do you find it difficult being in groups of people? Is reading and writing more difficult?)

In light of your answers on the previous two pages, do you foresee any problems? Can you see any possible solutions to these potential problems?

- **Travelling to and from work (driving, using public transport, cycling)**

Problem	Possible solution/s

- **The work environment (stairs, suitable toilets, hazards, noise and other distractions. Would you be expected to work from home?)**

Problem	Possible solution/s

- **Team dynamics (support, relationships at work, culture of the organisation, how have other members of staff been supported to return to work?)**

Problem	Possible solution/s

- **Look back at your job description on page 6. Are there any specific parts of your job that you think might be difficult or cause a problem?** ***Fill out the remaining tables with any issues you foresee:***

Problem	Possible solution/s
Problem	Possible solution/s
Problem	Possible solution/s
Problem	Possible solution/s

Starting to 'test out' your work skills

When considering a return to work it is helpful to obtain some 'feedback' on your current abilities. This is beneficial as you have likely been out of work for some time so may not be aware how tired or unfit you are.

Through doing some normal day to day activities at home, you can begin to obtain some helpful feedback on your current abilities.

Examples of activities to try (providing this is safe for you to do) are:

- Sorting through paperwork, and letters
- Placing books or CDs in alphabetical order
- Using your computer for email, research or social media
- Walking (how depends on your current abilities and symptoms)
- Helping with a mini DIY project (do not use ladders or sharp tools)
- Making phone calls, e.g. to the bank, a local shop, ordering a family takeaway
- Cooking yourself a meal/snack (if it is safe to do so)

Many of these activities demand the same skills, abilities and elements that you will need to have for returning to work. For example using your home laptop for emails and social media enable you to build your typing skills and concentration.

Now consider:

- *How are you managing with these tasks?*
- *What went well?*
- *What did you struggle with?*
- *Are there things you need to practice more?*

Top Tip!

Use the log on the next page to collect your 'feedback'.

Through engaging in activities, you can consider how tired you felt, how difficult talking to others was, how easy concentrating on ordering books was, etc. Furthermore, if you did find any of these activities much more difficult than you had anticipated you can decide what you need to do to build up your skills more and plan this into your week.

After you have been testing out your work skills for some time, look back at your original goal on page 4. Does that goal still seem realistic? Do you need to tweak it or change it at all?

Date	**Activity** (e.g. building flat-pack furniture; making a budget spreadsheet; etc)	**Feedback** (e.g. How did you manage this task? What went well? What did you struggle with? Are there things you need to practice more?

Creating a work preparation plan



When we are working, we are in a routine or shift pattern. It might be a bit of a 'shock to the system' when you return to work if you haven't got yourself into a good routine before you start. A good routine will make the transition back to work easier.

The early stages of building a work plan may include the following:

Establishing a helpful Daily routine:
Establish helpful routines in terms of eating well, getting up and going to bed at a regular time.

Activity:
It is helpful to have a balance in terms of work, rest and play.

Work – e.g. Making phonecalls, housework, opening post.

Rest – e.g. Relaxation, listening to music, sitting in the garden with a cup of tea!

Play – e.g. Socialising, crafts, painting, gardening, sports, puzzles, games.

In the early days you might need more rest; however, over time this will improve. You can grade your re-engagement in activities through the following:

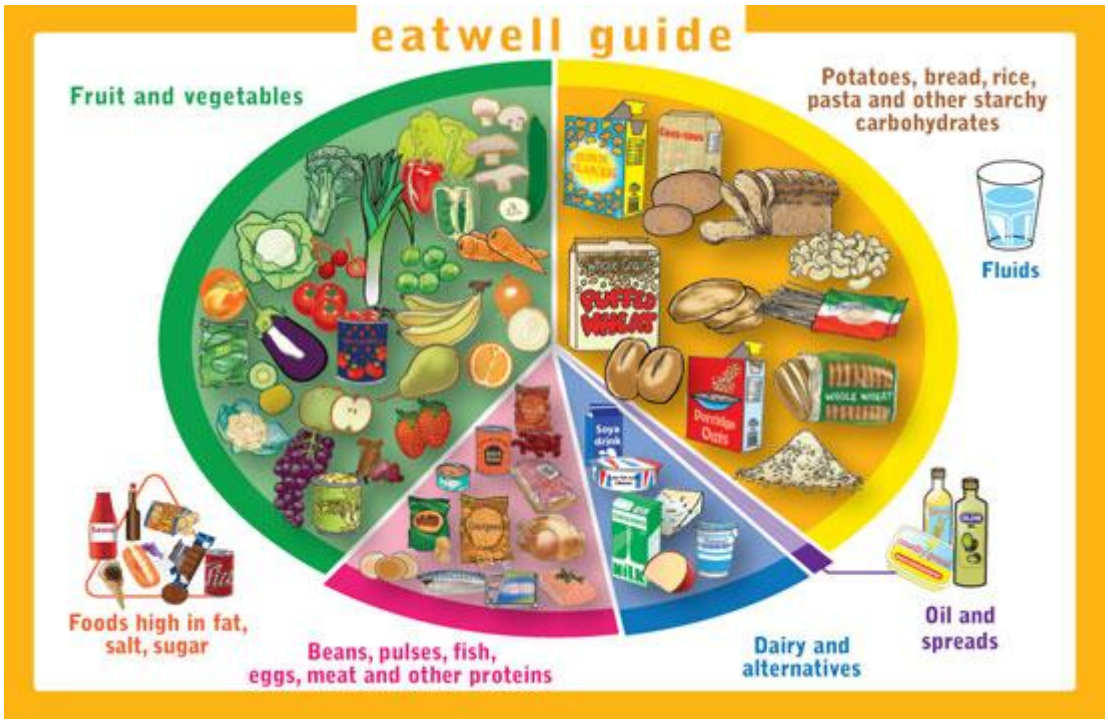
- **Limiting the time**: e.g. work for 20 minutes instead of an hour.
- **Limiting the complexity**: e.g. simplify the task; make a checklist; ask someone to help you; use equipment or IT to make it easier…
- **Limiting the distance**: e.g. get a taxi one way and walk back.
- **Simplifying activities**: e.g. sitting down to make a sandwich.
- **Prioritisation**: e.g. choosing to go to your children's parents evening but not doing the ironing that day.
- **Delegation**: e.g. getting a cleaner so that you can focus on activities you consider more important.

Remember to start small as this is more likely lead to success than 'over doing it' in the early stages.

Eating well

Make sure you are eating a balanced diet. This will ensure you are looking after yourself and getting into good eating habits before returning to work.

Stay hydrated (drink plenty of water and non-caffeinated drinks).



For more information on eating well visit https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/

Sleep:

- Have a helpful sleep routine with a regular waking time and bed time.
- Have a bedtime wind-down routine, e.g. a bath, reading, relaxation.
- Turn off any electronic gadgets several hours before bed time; they can prevent you from getting to sleep.
- Try not to drink liquids too late before bed as this increases the need to get up to use the toilet.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine as this disrupts your sleep.

Managing your fatigue

If fatigue is an ongoing problem for you then please contact our service to request a copy of the Fatigue Management Manual.

Planning your Return to Work

Most employers will allow you to complete a '**phased return to work'**. By this, we mean that you initially return on reduced hours and duties. Then you gradually build these up.

This phased return has to be agreed by your employer.

Usually the framework they use is included in your employer's **absence management policy** – you will feel more informed on what to expect if you ask to view this policy now.

Some examples of options for a phased return are:

- Going back to work on temporarily reduced hours (e.g. half days or alternate days) for the first few weeks then gradually building this up. **(You may need an '*adjusted Fit-note'* from your GP to cover you in doing this.)**
- Changing the hours you work, perhaps starting and finishing earlier or later to avoid travelling in rush hour.
- Changing some of your duties, or reducing some duties temporarily.
- Sharing some tasks with a colleague.

Changing parts of your workspace so it is better suited to you. For example you might need a different keyboard, some new IT software, a set of headphones to take calls or a better chair.
Your employer and *Access To Work* can help you with this. You can self-refer to the Access To Work scheme.

There is currently a big waiting list for Access to Work, so refer yourself at the earliest opportunity. www.gov.uk/access-to-work

- Changing your routines to make work easier, or to fit with when you feel at your best or have more energy.

Summary

We hope this information booklet has helped you to think about your return to work goals, and has provided some helpful tips on what you can begin to do whilst recovering from your ill health.

Additional Support

The following organisations will be able to support you with your return to work:

Citizens' Advice Bureau Online, phone-based or face to face advice on a range of topics including your rights at work (including pay, contracts, holiday and sick pay); agency workers' rights; flexible working; and parental rights. https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/	**Unions** **If you are a union member get in touch with your union at your earliest opportunity.** They will be able to advise you in terms of your rights and negotiate with your employer with regards to your return to work. They can advocate on your behalf and challenge decisions.
The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). ACAS is an independent public body that provide free and impartial advice on employment rights; best practice and policies; and resolving workplace conflict. ACAS help to resolve workplace disputes between employers and employees. https://www.acas.org.uk/advice	**Equality Advisory Support Service.** This helpline advises and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights, including disability employment rights. They can also accept referrals from organisations which, due to capacity or funding issues, are unable to provide face to face advice to local users of their services. https://www.gov.uk/equality-advisory-support-service
Occupational Health If you work for a larger organisation your employer may have an in-house Occupational Health department. Smaller organisations might contract Occupational Health out to a specialist firm. Some companies do not have Occupational Health. The role of Occupational Health is to advise your employer on the impact of you condition on your work and any reasonable adjustments or phased return which you might need. This is considered in the light of your employing organisation's policies.	**Access to Work** If you have a job already, or if you are about to start a new job, you may be able to get help from Access to Work. You may be able to claim a financial grant, based on your needs, to cover: • Special equipment, adaptations, or a support worker to help you do things like answer the phone and go to meetings • Help getting to and from work and any travelling as part of your job. www.gov.uk/access-to-work
Welfare Rights Unit Leeds City Council's Welfare Rights Unit can give you free, confidential, impartial advice and support on a whole range of issues: e.g. support to fill out benefits forms; guidance and support when making appeals; and checking your benefit entitlement and give guidance on using benefit systems. welfare.rights@leeds.gov.uk or 0113 376 0452	**Charities that can offer advice:** • Stroke Association: www.stroke.org.uk • MS Society: www.mssociety.org.uk • Headway: www.headway.org.uk • MS Trust: www.mstrust.org.uk • Parkinson's UK: www.parkinsons.org.uk • Scope – the disability equality charity: www.scope.org.uk
National Careers Service	**Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**

Information, advice and guidance to help make decisions on learning, training and work. The service offers confidential and impartial advice and is supported by qualified careers advisers. Their website has career tools to help you make decisions about careers, learning and work, and advice on completion of your nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk	Responsible for welfare, benefits and pension policy. Free customer service contact number 0800 055 6688 or www.gov.uk

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