



Return to Work Advice

An advice leaflet for individuals, employers and health professionals

Work and Health

Work helps us keep physically and mentally fit. Whilst a period of sickness absence from work maybe essential to help us recover from an operation, illness or accident, an over prolonged time away from work may not be the best thing in the longer term.

It is common for both an individual and their employer to be fearful of facilitating a return to work too soon. Sometimes it can be difficult for the individual and the employer to find out the correct information and know what is best for all parties. Occupational Health professionals are best placed to assist this process but there are a lot of simple step that all involved can follow. This leaflet aims to provide some principles and guidance on safe return to work.

Key Messages

- 100% fitness is not essential to return to work safely. Often work may help an individual to recover from health problems and also support well-being for individuals with longer term health conditions.
- A 'Fit note' or AHP Advisory Fitness for Work Report is guidance only. Health professionals and/or the individual working with the employer may update this guidance, for example, where an individual may recover more quickly than expected from an illness and be returning to work in a supportive environment (1).
- Effective and safe return to work planning is best facilitated through shared decision making by the individual, employer and health professional. Effective communication is essential for this to occur.
- Small changes at work can often make a big difference to an individual's successful return to work after a period of sickness absence.
- Most individuals really do want to get back to work; listen to their fears and concerns and ideas. Often they are best placed to work out a solution themselves.

- Line managers play an importance role by providing crucial ongoing support in the workplace. Use of specific return to work questionnaires (RTW) can be helpful such as the HSE RTW Questionnaire (2). Some line managers may require further training to help them understand the importance of their role in this process.
- If necessary, request assistance from Occupational Health Professionals, who are specially trained to provide confidential advice and recommendations on whether an individual is fit to return to work and if workplace adaptations or change of duties is required.

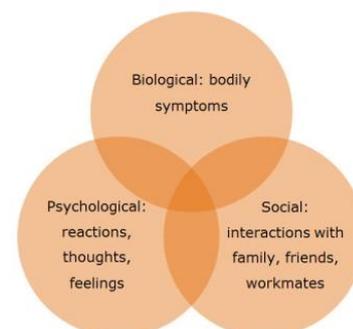
The Biopsychosocial Model (BPSM) of Health

BPSM of Health is individual-centred and underpins Occupational Health Assessment. It is essential to adopt this approach when supporting injured or sick workers back to work. Here the cause or the outcome of ill health of an individual is attributed to the interaction between biological factors (such as genetics), psychosocial factors (such as personality, beliefs and behaviours) and social factors (such as culture, relationships and socioeconomic status).

No two people are the same, despite possibly undergoing the same surgical procedure, so any return to work plan or workplace adjustments must take into consideration numerous different factors regarding the specific individual concerned.

An understanding of the fluctuating complexities within this model will help anybody dealing with injured or sick workers whether they are a health professional, employer or relative. Further reading on this topic is advised (see reference list).

The BPSM of Health



Job Demands and Task Analysis

A thorough understanding of the normal work duties and tasks being undertaken is essential prior to any decision being made on returning an individual employee off sick back to work. This can sometimes be difficult for health professionals such as GPs due to time restraints and the inability to view the individual at work. Occupational

Health Professionals are often able to analyse these work demands more thoroughly especially if based on site. Effective communication with the individual worker, their employer and the use of photography and videos can also assist in this process. Specific medical or health professional advice may then be required to decide if they can safely return to work and if any work adaptations are required.

Occupational Health Professionals are best placed to undertake complex assessments and write detailed reports especially where large work place adaptations or difficult phased return to work plans are required.

Government Fit for Work Scheme

The Fit for Work Scheme is a Government funded initiative where GPs and employers throughout England and Wales can refer their employed patients and employees who have been, or are likely to be, off sick from work for four weeks or more for a voluntary occupational health assessment. Individuals can also access information from the website or call the free advice line on: **0800 032 6235**

Remploy

Remploy provide a free and confidential workplace mental health support service to help support both employers and individuals. Call **0300 4568114** for further information.

The Case for Occupational Health Physiotherapy Assessment

Occupational Health Physiotherapy is evidence based with a proven track record of return on investment (1).

The in-depth clinical knowledge of an Occupational Health Physiotherapist places them in a great position to correctly assess if an individual is fit to return to work and to provide on-going support in the workplace such as 'hands on' physiotherapy treatment, ergonomic assessment and review. Occupational Health Physiotherapists often utilize a tool kit of functional tests to assist their decision making for assessing fitness to work and function.

The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Occupational Health and Ergonomics (ACPOHE) has a database of Chartered Physiotherapists specialised in Occupational Health Assessment and Management. This includes a list of Registered Members of ACPOHE with a higher level of experience and knowledge in Occupational Health. For further information please see:

<http://www.acpohe.org.uk/physio-near-you-search-facility>



References

(1) **Can I go back to work before the end date on my fit note?**

<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/2559.aspx?CategoryID=87&SubCategoryID=87>

(2) **HSE Return to Work Questionnaire**

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/pdfs/returntowork.pdf>

(3) **Chartered Society of Physiotherapy 2015**

<http://www.csp.org.uk/professional-union/practice/evidence-base/physiotherapy-works/occupational-health>

Further Reading/Relevant Websites

Association of Occupational Health Nursing Practitioners

<http://aohnp.co.uk/>

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

<http://www.csp.org.uk/>

College of Occupational Therapists

<https://www.cot.co.uk/>

Faculty of Occupational Health

<http://www.fom.ac.uk/>

Fit Note:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note>

Fit for Work

<http://fitforwork.org/>

Fitness for Work: The Medical Aspects (4th Edition) 2013 by Keith T Palmer (Author), Ian Brown (Contributor), John Hobson (Contributor), Faculty of Occupational Medicine (ISBN: 9780199643240)

National School of Occupational Health

<https://hee.nhs.uk/our-work/attracting-recruiting/national-schools/national-school-occupational-health>

Remploy

www.rempoy.co.uk

Society for Occupational Health

<https://www.som.org.uk/>

The Biopsychosocial Model of Health

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biopsychosocial_model

When do I need a fit note?

<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1062.aspx?CategoryID=190&SubCategoryID>

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