

Returning to work after amputation

The information in this factsheet is intended to be a guide and does not cover every circumstance. It is possible that some of the information is over simplified or may become inaccurate overtime because of changes to the law.

Returning to work after a life changing event can be a daunting prospect. It may be many months past the initial accident/trauma before you would be feel able to consider returning to work. You may need a period of rehabilitation or are building up your tolerance and energy levels to wearing your prosthesis.

For many, returning to work, is a big step forwards in their recovery. Work has a positive impact on your rehabilitation, giving structure to your day, a sense of normality, financial stability and social contact as well as a great sense of achievement.

It is often advisable not to wait until all your pain or other symptoms have gone, or all your medical interventions are completed, because these things may never go away completely, and you need to find ways to modify your work and life to adapt. You may also want to consider if you may be able to achieve some of your work activities from a wheelchair, if this is required, for periods when you may not be able to wear your prosthesis.

Recovery takes time and so it is important not to expect too much of yourself. Try not to put too much pressure on yourself. Don't worry if you have one or two setbacks - this is to be expected. But a planned and well thought out return to work phase will help in ensuring it goes smoothly.

Returning to work may include

- Paid work
- Unpaid work experience
- Volunteering
- Further training and education or alternative type of work if it is not reasonable due to the work requirements, for you to return to your previous type of work.

Your employer or potential employer cannot discriminate against you because of your disability - you are protected by the Equality Act 2010. This legislation also states your employer has to make "reasonable adjustments" to support you in your return to work and that you cannot be treated less favorably than others at work because of your disability. (For further information see below.)

They must also keep your job open for you and can't put pressure on you to resign just because you have become disabled.

Fit Note

If you are employed, you must give your employer a "fit note" if you are off sick for more than 7 days in a row (including non-working days). You should keep the original fit note and your employer should keep a copy. You may require this copy as evidence towards benefits entitlement.

The Fit Note helps to inform your employer how your condition affects your ability to work. This will help your employer understand how they might help you to continue to work or return to work.

In order to fill in the Fit Note, your hospital doctor, GP, rehabilitation consultant or therapist may ask about the nature of your work as this may influence any advice about when you are fit to return to work and how best to support you in doing so.

It is suggested that you ask for a copy of any written opinion on your return to work.

Further information:

Taking sick leave: www.gov.uk/taking-sick-leave

The fit note: www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note

Keeping in touch

It is essential that you contact your employer at the earliest opportunity. You will need to provide them with your Fit Note and keep them informed of progress, in line with their sickness absence policy. If you are likely to be off for a while, you may want to talk to your employer about ways of keeping in touch. You could agree on how often to maintain contact as not being in touch may make some feel isolated to the work environment.

There may be different people at your workplace who may be involved or you may wish to contact

- Your line manager- usually the first person you will talk to
- Your human resources manager (HR)
- Occupational Health advisor
- Your trade union representative

Sick pay

Most people in employment are entitled to sick pay.

- Company sick pay - this is your employers own sick pay scheme. Check your contract to find out what you are entitled to. It may be more generous than SSP or paid on top. Some employers pay in full up to a certain time.
- Statutory sick pay (SSP) - if you aren't entitled to anything under a company scheme, your employer should still pay you SSP if you are eligible.

You may want to look at your conditions of contract to ensure what your contract states regarding your ongoing sick pay.

For further information: www.gov.uk/statutory-sick-pay

If you are self-employed, you cannot receive SSP but are able to claim Employment and Support Allowance.

If you or your injured family member is self-employed or unemployed, you may require a Fit Note to support a claim for health-related benefits.

If you are at school, college or university, you will need to contact the course provider and follow the sickness absence reporting procedure.

Employee assistance

Some employers run employee assistance programmes that help you deal with any personal problems that may be affecting your work and can involve support from a professional counsellor.

The Dorset prosthetic Service also has a Support & Counselling Therapist who can help with emotional adjustments.

Agreeing a return to work plan

As you approach being able to return to work, it is important that your employer knows in advance about any restrictions and adjustments that may be needed. Many employers have a set policy for return to work after an extended period of illness or injury and may refer you to the occupational health advisor (OH) or suggest a return to work interview. This is to ensure that the correct support is in place for you to ensure a smooth transition back into the workplace.

You can also self-refer to your employment occupational health advisor (OH). An OH advisor will give you independent work related health advice based on your situation. They can recommend adjustments to help you return to work.

If there is doubt about your ability to return to work or related risks, specialist advice may be needed, it may be helpful to discuss with the Vocational Rehabilitation Service or Disability Employment Advisor at your local job centre or discuss with your occupational therapist.

Before returning to work, it may be useful to do a Job Analysis, listing all the physical and cognitive tasks you have to do at work. When completed, split the tasks into:

- **Primary tasks** - the things that are critical to your job
- **Secondary tasks** - all the things that have to be done such as calls, emails etc.

Next to each primary task, write down what you need to be able to do to complete it ie stand for 30mins or concentrate for 40 mins. Place a tick if you feel you can do it, a cross if you don't feel able and a question mark if unsure.

Do the same for the secondary list.

You will now have an idea of what you need to work on to be able to return to work and what you need to work on as your rehabilitation goals.

Your Occupational Therapist or other Allied Health Professional can provide you and your employer with further information on how best to return to work by prescribing adjustments within an **Allied Health Professional Advisory Fitness for Work Report**.

Under employment law, all employees and employers have certain rights and responsibilities. You can get information about these general employment rights from various sources, including the department of work and pensions, your trade union, CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) and ACAS (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service).

“Fit for Work” service

“Fit for work” is supported through the Department for Work and Pensions, is free and helps employees stay in or return to work and is a government supported occupational health service. It provides an occupational health assessment and general health and work advice to employees, employers and GP's.

Fit for Work will complement, and not replace, existing occupational health services provided by employers. It will fill the gap in support that currently exists and will especially benefit those employers who currently have limited in-house occupational health services.

You can self-refer to Fit for Work for support and guidance.

For further information: <http://fitforwork.org> Tel 0800 032 6235

Reasonable adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010, an employer has a duty to make “reasonable adjustments” to make sure you are not disadvantaged compared to non-disabled people in the workplace.

The term ‘reasonable’ is used to ensure that an employer's liability is limited to what is reasonable in terms of cost to the company in relation to its size and turnover.

The need to make reasonable adjustments can apply to the working arrangements or any physical aspects of the workplace. Examples of reasonable adjustments are:

- Adjusting your working hours and allowing flexible working pattern
- Providing an adapted piece of equipment to help you to do the job. ie specialist keyboard for one handed use
- Physical adjustments might include replacing steps with a ramp or allowing a wheelchair user to work on the ground floor
- Allowing you to arrange your hours to attend therapy or hospital appointments

For further information: <https://www.gov.uk/rights-disabled-person/employment>

For further advice about employee rights and responsibilities can be found on www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001068

Access to work

Access to Work is a government scheme that provides advice and practical support and/or grant to the disabled person who is employed, self-employed or unemployed and about to start a job or work scheme.

The Access to Work grant can pay for things like:

- adaptations to the equipment you use
- special equipment
- fares to work if you can't use public transport
- a support worker or job coach to help you in your workplace
- disability awareness training for your colleagues
- the cost of moving your equipment if you change location or job

You can apply for an Access to Work grant online.

When you apply:

- the Department for Work and Pensions will contact your employer
- someone might visit you at work.

For further information on how to apply, visit: www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview or www.disabilityrightsuk.org/access-work

Self employed

If you are self employed, some of the above aspects may not apply.

The Citizens Advice Bureau may be able to give assistance as to what is available to support return to work or how you might be able to access alternative work.

The following websites also have useful information:

www.gov.uk/employment-status/selfemployed-contractor

www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/employment-status

Looking for a new job

It may be that you feel unable to return to your previous employment as the type of work would not be safe or possible for you to achieve or you may feel that this is an opportunity for you to review your life and skills and feel that a new direction would be more appropriate for you.

You can get help from the local job center or Vocational Rehabilitation service or your Occupational Therapist will be able to help you consider what options may be suitable for you.

When you're looking for work, look on adverts and application forms for either:

- the 'disability confident' symbol
- the 'positive about disabled people' symbol



Both symbols mean the employer is committed to employing disabled people.

If a job advert displays either symbol, you'll be guaranteed an interview if you meet the basic conditions for the job.

Getting help

Your local Job Centre can help you find a job or gain new skills and tell you about disability-friendly employers in your area. Contact the Disability Employment Advisor at your local Job Centre Plus

They can also refer you to a specialist work psychologist, if appropriate, or carry out an 'employment assessment', asking you about:

- your skills and experience
- what kind of roles you're interested in

Ask about the work the work coach at your local Job Centre.

For further information: www.gov.uk/work-choice/overview

Vocational Rehabilitation Service

It may be useful to establish if your local area has a Vocational Rehabilitation Service.

Vocational Rehabilitation involves helping the person and others understand and cope with how physical, cognitive and psychological consequences of a long term health condition affect your ability to work.

You will need to be referred by your health professional. The service will help you explore alternative work options, or support remaining in your current job.

Volunteering

Volunteering can be a good route into returning into employment. The benefits that this may provide are

- learning new skills
- gain valuable work experience
- establishing a daily routine
- Meet new people and improve social life.

Generally volunteering should not affect your benefits, as long as you are only receiving agreed, out-of-pocket expenses.

If you are still employed but unable to return to your existing work but considering a period of volunteer work, it is advisable to tell your employer as it may be perceived that you are fit for work.

You don't have a contract of employment as a volunteer, so you don't have the same rights as an employee or worker.

You will usually be given a volunteer agreement that explains:

- the level of supervision and support you'll get
- what training you'll get
- whether you're covered under the organization's employer or public liability insurance
- health and safety issues
- any expenses the organization will cover

The volunteer agreement isn't compulsory, but sets out what you can expect from the organization you're volunteering for. It doesn't form a contract between you and the organization.

There's no upper age limit on volunteering. However, some organizations' insurance policies don't cover you if you're under 16 or over a certain age (usually 80).

Other useful organisations

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

- responsible for welfare, benefits and pension policy.

Tel: Free customer service contact number **0800 055 6688**

Website: www.gov.uk

Access to work

Tel **0345 268 8489**

Website: www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Citizens Advice Bureau

Provides advice on a variety of issues including financial, legal, housing and employment issues.

Tel: Find details of your local office in the telephone book or website.

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

National Careers Service

Provides 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 CV.

Website: <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

Gives advice to employees and employers to help improve working life and relations. Offers information, advice and training. Can also offer advice and support if you feel at risk of losing your job.

Helpline: **0300 123 1100**

Website: www.acas.org.uk

Your local library may also have useful resources and may run services such as job clubs.

The Royal Bournemouth Hospital, Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW

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