RETURN TO WORK FOR EMPLOYEES

Returning to work following an absence can often be the most critical component of your recovery. The Wellness & Recovery (W&R) office will help you best handle the transition back to work.

This guide outlines steps you may take to help make your return to work smooth and successful. It provides information on actions you may want to consider before returning to work, on your first day back and throughout your return to work period. Participating in a W&R supported Return to Work will not only benefit your health but will also help your supervisor understand how he/she can best support you during this transitional period.

Key concepts to help you successfully manage your return to work

**Work is a key part of your recovery.**
Gradually incorporating work demands into your recovery may help to improve your chances of staying healthy. Work may benefit your overall health by providing structure and routine, social interaction, physical and mental stimulation and a sense of accomplishment.

**Returning to work may require an adjustment period.**
You may not be able to fully perform the physical and mental demands of your job in the same way as prior to the onset of your condition. You may require a temporary accommodation to help you gradually reintegrate into the hours and duties required for your job. The Wellness & Recovery (W&R) office is keen to work with you and your physician to find a suitable accommodation while you are still recovering from your injury or illness.

**Stay connected and keep lines of communication open**
To help make your return to work successful, it is important that you stay connected with your supervisor. Talk to him/her about how you envision your return to work, your worries or concerns about returning, your motivation, your thoughts about what you can do to prepare and what you will need to assist your transition back to the workplace.

**What do I need to do to return to work after an injury or illness?**

1. You must provide medical information clearing you to return to work, clearly outlining limitations or restrictions (if any) to your duties and/or hours and the length of time you will require to return to work to full time and duties. The Attending Physicians’ Statement Form is a useful tool for your physician to provide all the information necessary for your return to work. You may access a copy at: http://www.sfu.ca/human-resources/forms/index.html. This form can be submitted to your supervisor or directly to the W&R office.

2. Contact your supervisor in advance to your return to work date. This will allow your supervisor to make any arrangements necessary to facilitate your return to work. This may include scheduling of other staff, procurement of special equipment, etc.

3. Attend regular Return to Work meetings with your supervisor and the Wellness & Recovery consultant. You may wish to invite your union or association representative. The purpose of these meetings is to:
   - review limitations and restrictions and the return to work plan and to understand how you will evaluate success and address issues
   - discuss things like workload, job duties and performance to make sure your expectations and your supervisor’s expectations align
   - address problems early so they don’t negatively impact your recovery
   - identify if there are workplace factors causing problems and proactively address these with your manager and come up with solutions together
• discuss any extra training or reintegration time/resources that may be required
• validate that you have an easily accessible list of resources should you run into difficulties or begin to feel overwhelmed
• try to get back into a regular work routine.

TIPS
• It is important that you address problems early. If there are workplace factors that may affect or exacerbate your condition, talk to your supervisor and/or W&R consultant so that together you can develop strategies to deal with stressful situations positively and proactively.
• Advise your attending physician that the University has a Return to Work program and that in most cases modified duties/hours are available.
• It is important to always maintain focus on your recovery. After returning to work, continue with your treatment and see your health care providers regularly, or as needed.
• Remember that your doctors and your W&R team form part of your support system. Other resources include your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), your Union, or Trades Association representative/agent, family, friends and community. Know that you will need extra support during the return to work.

Do I require a workplace accommodation?
The purpose of workplace accommodations is to help remove return to work barriers thus allowing you to return to work as soon as possible. Accommodations are assessed on a case-by-case basis to meet your needs and relate to your medical condition. Accommodation examples may include the following:
• Hours: graduated return to work; flex time to attend appointments; balance work/life; non-standard breaks during the work day.
• Duties: modification of work tasks; elimination of non-essential tasks during the return to work; allowing extra time to complete tasks.
• Modification of work environment: lighting; noise or other distractions.
• Other accommodations as indicated by your physician.

What should I tell my manager?
Your manager plays a critical role in your return to work. Maintain an open and honest approach.
• Sometimes saying nothing can lead to problems since your supervisor might mistakenly confuse your medical condition with performance problems. Find a balance between your own privacy and helping your manager understand your situation.
• Your manager should know how your medical condition affects your ability to work, including your prognosis to return to work—this will allow him/her to make operational decision. Communicate general terms like limitations and restrictions, and general nature of illness or disability. You are entitled to keep your specific diagnosis and/or treatment confidential.

What should I tell my co-workers?
Details of your absence are private and confidential. Only you can determine whether or not you want to share this information, and with whom. If you are unsure of the best approach, talk to the W&R team.

Is my medical information kept confidential?
If you choose not to share your medical information such as diagnosis and treatment with your supervisor, you have the option of providing your medical information directly to the W&R office. They will
advise you when, how and for what purpose your information may be shared through a process of informed consent as per the BC Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). The W&R staff will share, however, the doctor’s feedback on your limitations, prognosis for recovery, prognosis for return to work and specific needs for work accommodation with your supervisor or other University representatives on a need to know basis only.

**Where can I go if I need more support?**
- Wellness & Recovery Office  
  Ph: 778.782.6698  
  Confidential Fax: 778.782.6873
- Your Union or Association Office
- Employee and Family Assistance Program (Human Solutions)  
  Ph: 1.800.663.1142  
  Web: http://www.humansolutions.ca
- Your physician or therapist (if you are seeing one).

**Some helpful online resources:**

- [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)  
  (BC resource for tools, tips and information on mental health issues and wellness)
- [http://www.iwh.on.ca](http://www.iwh.on.ca)  
  (Institute for Health and Work – a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, protecting and improving the health of workers)
- [http://www.cmha.bc.ca](http://www.cmha.bc.ca)  
  (information and resources on mental health issues)
- [https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/](https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/)  
  (resources for individuals and supervisors on mental health in workplaces)