Ontario Tech
UNIVERSITY

Return to Work Program

Participants' Guide

What is a Return to Work Program?

The Return to Work Program is a plan to assist injured or ill employees return to productive employment as soon as it is safe to do so. Supporting an employee in returning to work is an important aspect of their recovery process.

The key to a successful Return to Work Program is a strong collaboration and a shared responsibility between the ill or injured employee and return to work partners.

What are the goals of a Return to Work Program?

1. To enable injured employees to be productive during their recuperation and to maintain a connection to the workplace.

2. To develop an individualized return to work plan which meets the needs of the employee and the department/faculty operational requirements.

How does the Return to Work Program benefit an employee?

- promotes physical health, well-being and recovery of the injured employee
- promotes the psychological well-being of injured employee
- assists in preventing disability
- maintains a social bond with coworkers
- maintains an occupational bond with the employer
- protects employee benefits
- protects employability
- reduces the impact of disability on families

Who are the key participants in the Return to Work Program?

The employee, manager and the Health and Disability Management Specialist are the key participants. Depending on the complexity and individual circumstances, the Environmental Health and Safety Officer, Disability Case Manager and the WSIB Officer (in cases of workplace injuries) may also be involved.

What are the main responsibilities of the Return to Work partners?

Employee

- Be an active participant in the return to work process.

- Promptly provide necessary medical documentation to clarify relevant limitations or restrictions needed for return to work planning.
- Make return to work/accommodation needs known and actively participate in discussions for the identification of suitable modified work.
- Maintain regular contact with the Manager throughout the recovery process and during the development and implementation of the return to work plan.

Manager

- Engage in the creation and implementation of a return to work plan while working in collaboration with the employee and return to work partners.
- Actively identifying and reviewing reasonable return to work/accommodation solutions to assist the employee in a safe and suitable return to productive employment.
- Provide job demands information to support the goal of returning the employee to work in a timely and healthy manner.
- Meet with the employee and provide support throughout the return to work transition period.
- Monitor and report on employee progress.

Health and Disability Management Specialist

- Accountable for the overall management of the Return to Work Program.
- Ensure terms of policies and procedures as well as Collective Agreements are applied fairly and consistently.
- Foster the importance of maintaining confidentiality and upholding the dignity of the employee.
- Engage with both employee and manager to maintain open communication throughout the process and provide information and guidance as needed.
- Through a collaborative and consultative approach, create, implement, adjust when applicable and monitor the return to work plan which may also include temporary or permanent accommodations.

Disability Case Manager

- Receive and adjudicate employee medical documentation in a timely manner.
- Ensure that there is sufficient and appropriate medical information to validate functional limitations and restrictions.
- Provide details on the employee's limitations and restrictions as part of the return to work and/or accommodation process based on medical documentation provided by the treatment provider.
- Protect the confidentiality of employee medical information by sharing only information as it relates to the employee's limitations and restrictions and not details of the diagnosis.

What questions need to be answered as part of the return to work planning process?

Timelines:

- What is the anticipated return to work plan start and end date?
- Is the employee returning gradually?
- What weeks does the plan cover?
- What days of the week will the employee work?

Last updated: September 2023

- How many hours a day will the employee work?
- What essential tasks and duties will the employee resume during the return to work transition period?
- What is the proposed schedule for resuming job tasks?

Employee restrictions and accommodation considerations:

- Are there any medical restrictions and limitations that the employee and employer need to adhere to?
- Are the restrictions temporary or permanent?
- If temporary, how long are the restrictions expected to last?
- Are any work accommodations needed? If so, what are the accommodations?
- Why is each accommodation necessary?

Return to Work Monitoring:

- How and who will monitor the employee's progress during the return-to-work process?
- How will changes to the return-to-work plan be made if needed or required?

Employee Return to Work Checklist

The following checklist will provide generalized points to consider. Feel free to add or omit items depending on an individual's needs.

Prior to returning to work:	
Work in collaboration with manager in the creation of a return to work plan. Having a plan prepared in advance of your return will have a positive impact on your overall success and wellbeing.	
With the support from your manager, determine if you will need any refresher training including Mandatory Training requirements. Knowing these details in advance will allow time for manager to arrangement for training delivery.	
Develop a plan for staying in touch with the supports and resources that were in place while on a leave of absence. These supports may include health care professionals, friends and family and services made available through the Employee Assistance Program .	
Leading up to first day back	
Update parking, carpool arrangements or check transit schedule and fares.	
Confirm child and/or elder care arrangements.	
Prepare clothes, uniform and/or personal items.	
Check to see if any medical or personal appointments need to be rescheduled.	
Do you need to pack any items for first and subsequent days back at work (lunch, snacks, assistive devices, pictures for your desk etc.)?	

Do you need to set the alarm a bit earlier on the first day so that there is plenty of time to get ready and to avoid feeling rushed?	
After returning from leave:	
Make arrangements to meet with colleagues, committees etc. and get reacquainted/updated on developments and changes since your departure.	
Check-in with your manager on first day back and let them know you have arrived and make plans to meet with the manager once you get settled in.	
Do you need to update any personal information i.e. address, emergency contact information, phone numbers?	
Review important policies and procedures such as emergency fire drill information and find out the names of Fire Wardens in your area.	

Additional tips to consider once you have returned to work:

● Remember on your first day back that you have been away from work and quite possibly, for a few months. Do not worry if you feel like it is your first day in a new job. You will soon feel reconnected!

● Pace yourself and try to engage in an activity after work such as a hobby. This will give you something to look forward to and to help maintain work/life balance.

● Check-in with your Health and Disability Management Specialist or your Disability Case Manager (if applicable) if you should have any questions or concerns.

● Take the time to reacquaint yourself with your surroundings. If you are unsure about something, ask your manager or another colleague that you see as a positive support person.

Where can you go if you need more support?

1. Check out our Employee Assistance Program

2. Contact your Health and Disability Management Specialist.

3. Institute for Health and Work - a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting, protecting and improving the health of workers

4. Mental Health Works – a great resource for tools, tips and information regarding mental health in the workplace