

Return-to-activity: Work Considerations

Most people can return to work within days or weeks after the injury. When planning your return to regular activities you need to think about both cognitive and physical activity because both can make your concussion symptoms worse.

In the early days after your injury, try to avoid hard or heavy physical activities. Also try to avoid activities that have a high cognitive load. This would be activities that require a lot of attention, concentration, and problem solving, such as:



Reading or doing tasks that need you to focus or problem-solve



Using a computer or cell phone, watching TV, playing video games



Being in social situations with too many people, too much noise, or too many things happening at once

How can I manage my symptoms at work?

Returning to work is an important part of your recovery process and is recommended if it does not pose the risk of re-injury. Your return to work should be gradual and reflect your symptoms and your recovery process. It is important that you do not do too much too soon. Taking on too many tasks can cause your symptoms to get worse and can delay or prevent your recovery. It is important that your employer helps to modify your work environment and expectations of you, based on your work restrictions, any work accommodations, and symptom triggers.

More to consider

Helpful tips:

- **Keep track of your symptoms and your tolerance level for both cognitive and physical activity.**
- **If any activity causes the start of new or existing symptoms, reduce your effort for a short while.**
- **Take breaks often and gradually do the activity for a longer period of time.**
- **Keep track of changes in your mood and emotional well-being.**

If prolonged symptoms make it too hard for you to return to work, there are other short-term options you may want to do such as retraining, taking a course, or doing volunteer work.



Examples of work restrictions:

Your primary care provider will help you identify any restrictions that will impact your work. For example, if you have poor balance, a reasonable medical restriction would be “no working at heights”. If you have poor concentration or visual problems, a reasonable medical restriction would be “do not use heavy equipment”.

Examples of work accommodations:

- Flexible work hours (such as starting later or ending earlier)
- Gradual work re-entry (such as starting at 2 half-days per week and increasing hours gradually)
- Allowing more time to finish tasks
- A quiet space available for breaks throughout the day
- Temporary change of job
- Environmental modifications such as a quieter work space, more supervision, working from home or only working during hours that match your most alert times of the day
- Equipment to help you do your job (e.g. if you have difficulty with screens, you may need to use a blue light screen protector)

Your healthcare providers will help you create a plan to help you return to work. The goal of this plan is to allow you to work without making your symptoms worse or bringing on new symptoms. The plan that is right for you will depend on the work that you do and the symptoms you have.

Vocational Evaluation

Depending on your medical assessments, and if you have work accommodations, you may need to have a vocational evaluation. This is more likely to be done if your job could put your safety or the safety of others at risk, or if your work requires you to make a lot of difficult decisions.

This type of evaluation will look at the following:

- Your ability to function mentally and socially
- Your work demands
- Your work environment
- Other factors that are likely to help or make it difficult for you to return to work

Additional resources

Below is a list of resources you may find helpful to learn more about return to activity/work as well as tools that may help you with your recovery process.

Concussion Awareness for Ages 15 and Up (Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlpuD-iVJcM>

Caring for Yourself after a Concussion: Pacing and Planning (Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXQmnvlnXeA&list=PLvD7HhN5miML63F7N0F6ojlyiirUJmw&index=5>

Cognitive Function: Thinking Skills (webpage)

<https://concussion.vch.ca/cognitive-function-thinking-skills>

Return to Work after Concussion (PDF)

<https://braininjuryns.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Return-to-Work-Sep-24.pdf>

Becoming a Self-Manager: Problem Solving (webpage)

<https://concussion.vch.ca/problem-solving>