

JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

Fact Sheet Series

Job Accommodations for Return-to-Work

Job Accommodation Network
PO Box 6080
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080
(800)526-7234 (V)
(877)781-9403 (TTY)
jan@askjan.org
askjan.org



JAN'S ACCOMMODATION FACT SHEET SERIES

JOB ACCOMMODATIONS FOR RETURN-TO-WORK

The goal of a return-to-work program, sometimes called a transitional duty program, is to make job changes or provide job accommodations that return individuals to work who are absent for workers' compensation or disability-related reasons. Return-to-work programs help reduce workers' compensation costs and increase productivity by returning employees to work earlier. As part of a broader disability management program, a return-to-work program, including the provision of light duty, should also address the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act), and state workers' compensation and other disability-related laws.

Many of the accommodation questions JAN receives related to return-to-work involve gross motor limitations that cause difficulty lifting, carrying, moving, transferring, sitting, standing, walking, climbing, and accessing workstations and work-sites; fine motor limitations that involve keyboarding, mousing, writing, reporting, documenting, and gripping; difficulty reaching and bending; scheduling medical treatment; managing fatigue and weakness; performing activities of daily living; maintaining concentration; managing stress; and implementing ergonomic and light duty programs. The following is a quick overview of some of the job accommodations that might be useful when returning someone to work following an injury or illness. To discuss an accommodation situation with a consultant, contact JAN directly.

Gross Motor Impairment:

General

- Modify the work-site to make it accessible
- Provide an accessible route of travel to other work areas used by the employee
- Modify the workstation to make it accessible
- Make sure materials and equipment are within reach range
- Move workstation close to other work areas and break rooms

Industrial

- Provide overhead structure for lifting devices
- Place frequently used tools and supplies at or near waist height
- Provide low task chairs, stand/lean stools, and anti-fatigue mats
- Make wheelchairs, scooters, industrial tricycles, or golf carts available
- Provide compact lifting devices to push and pull supplies and tools from storage
- Provide aerial lifts, rolling safety ladders, and work platforms

Office

- Provide a height adjustable desk and ergonomic chair
- Move workstation close to commonly used office equipment

- Provide low task chair and rolling safety ladder
- Provide a cart to move files, mail, and supplies
- Provide a lazy Susan carousel or desktop organizer

Service

- Provide anti-fatigue mats and stand/lean stools
- Provide a height adjustable desk and ergonomic chair
- Move workstation close to commonly used office equipment
- Provide compact lifting devices to push and pull stock and supplies from shelves
- Provide carts to move supplies and stock

Medical

- Provide a spring bottomed linen cart
- Make patient lifting and transfer devices available
- Make wheelchairs, scooters, industrial tricycles, or golf carts available
- Train employees on proper lifting techniques and on proper use of patient lifting and transfer devices
- Provide powered beds for transporting patients
- Provide a height adjustable desk and ergonomic task chair

Fine Motor Impairment:

- Implement ergonomic workstation design, e.g., copy holder, monitor riser, articulating keyboard tray, task lighting, telephone headset, footrest, chair, arm supports, etc.
- Provide alternative computer access, e.g., speech recognition, foot mouse, etc.
- Provide alternative telephone access
- Provide writing and grip aids
- Provide a page turner and a book holder
- Provide a note taker
- Provide ergonomic tools, tool balancers, tool wraps, and anti-fatigue matting

Reaching and Bending:

- Rearrange storage areas so that heavy and frequently used materials are accessed at waist levels
- Raise individuals or lower materials to comfortable working levels
- Provide aerial personnel lifts, rolling safety ladders, work platforms, lift tables, height adjusters, reachers, and order pickers

Scheduling Medical Treatment:

- Allow a flexible work schedule and flexible use of leave time
- Allow work from home
- Reduce or eliminate physical exertion and workplace stress
- Schedule strategic breaks

Managing Fatigue/Weakness:

- Reduce or eliminate physical exertion and workplace stress
- Schedule periodic rest breaks away from the workstation
- Allow a flexible work schedule and flexible use of leave time
- Allow work from home
- Implement ergonomic workstation design
- Provide a scooter or other mobility aid if walking cannot be reduced

Performing Activities of Daily Living:

- Allow use of a personal attendant at work
- Allow use of a service animal at work
- Make sure the facility is accessible
- Move workstation closer to the restroom
- Allow longer breaks
- Refer to appropriate community services

Maintaining Concentration:

- Reduce distractions in the work area
- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Allow for use of white noise or environmental sound machines
- Allow the employee to play soothing music using a cassette player and headset
- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Reduce clutter in the employee's work environment
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps
- Restructure job to include only essential functions

Managing Stress:

- Provide praise and positive reinforcement
- Refer to counseling and employee assistance programs
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Provide sensitivity training to coworkers
- Allow the employee to take a break to use stress management techniques to deal with frustration

Implementing Administrative Modifications:

- Implement ergonomics training, i.e., proper lifting techniques and posture; task variation; chair, keyboard, mouse, monitor, and tool working height, etc. For additional information on ergonomics, see JAN's "Ergonomics in the Workplace: A Resource Guide" at <http://askjan.org/media/ergo.html>.
- Implement a light duty program. For additional information on providing light duty as a reasonable accommodation, see JAN's *Consultants' Corner* "Light Duty as a Reasonable Accommodation" at <http://askjan.org/corner/vol03iss05.htm>.

Resources

Job Accommodation Network

West Virginia University
PO Box 6080
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080
(800) 526-7234 Voice/TTY
jan@askjan.org
<http://askjan.org>

Office of Disability Employment Policy

200 Constitution Avenue, NW,
Room S-1303
Washington, DC 20210
(202) 693-7880
(202) 693-7881 TTY
infoODEP@dol.gov
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/welcome.html>

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

200 Independence Avenue SW
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
Room 715H
Washington, DC 20201
Toll Free: (800)356-4674
Fax: (202)260-1898
MRL1@cdc.gov
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html>

Occupational Safety & Health Administration

200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210
Toll Free: (800)321-6742
TTY: (877)889-5627
<http://www.osha.gov>

For information on state workers' compensation programs, visit:
<http://www.dol.gov/esa/regs/compliance/owcp/wc.htm>

For information on federal workers' compensation programs, visit:
<http://www.dol.gov/esa/owcp/dfec/>

For information on state labor laws, visit:
<http://www.dol.gov/esa/programs/whd/state/state.htm>

Updated 03/24/10.

This document was developed by the Job Accommodation Network, funded by a contract agreement from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL079RP20426). The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Labor. Nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Labor.