



Returning to Work from Sick Leave

Introduction

This booklet provides information to employees who are out of work with long term sick leave, and to support them to get back to work as soon as possible. It goes through all the steps in the process, some of which may or may not apply to you.



What policies should I follow?

The HSE Managing Attendance policy contains relevant information for employees who are absent from work.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/managingattendance.pdf>

- Tell your line manager if you're going to be out and as much as possible about how long this absence may continue – they need to arrange cover for your role.
- Send in medical certificates from your doctor on a weekly basis.
- Keep in contact with your line manager.
- Link in with employee supports – Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programme.

The 'Rehabilitation of employees back to work after illness or injury policy and procedure' provides information about making the return to work.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/hrppg/rehabilitation-of-employees-back-to-work-after-illness-or-injury.html>

Other useful information is available at the back of this booklet.



Keep in Contact

Expect to be contacted by your line manager – yes, it's policy, but it can also be helpful and a source of support for you.

Agree when you will be contacted and by whom – Plan the next contact when talking to them.

Use the phone if possible – Talking is best.

If you are very unwell, arrange for someone else to be a contact – Spouse, partner, friend.

Plan for the contact – Write down updates that you have or questions you need to ask.

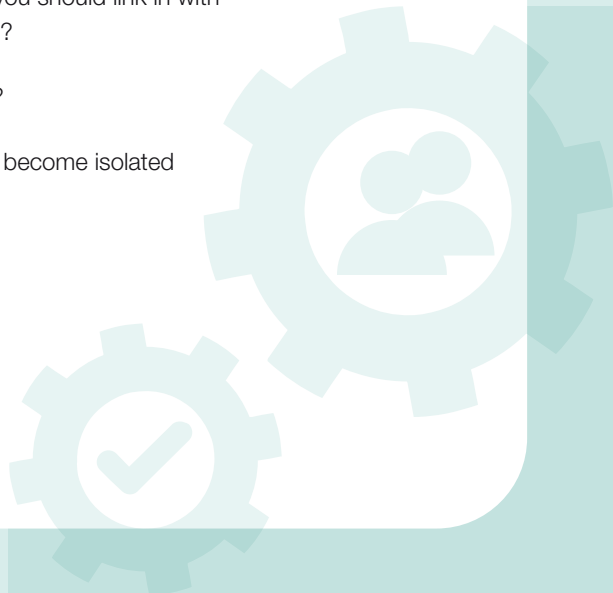
Discuss the social aspects of work – stay involved with workplace news or changes.

Consider...

Are there other departments you should link in with
e.g. payroll, human resources?

What about your co-workers?

Keep up relationships – don't become isolated
from the workplace.



Be Good to Yourself

Follow your treatment plan from your healthcare provider – i.e. your Doctor, Physiotherapist, Counsellor, etc.

Consider self-care

Do you have a reasonably healthy diet?

Are you exercising within your capabilities?

Are you sleeping enough?

Do you have support from friends and family?

Consider what needs your focus and if necessary ask for help from your family and friends, or your GP or other healthcare providers.

Consider using the Employee Assistance Programme, which provides a free confidential counselling service – being out of work can be difficult to cope with, so don't underestimate its impact.

<https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-and-services/employee-assistance-programme-staff-counselling/>

Freephone number **0818 327 327**

You can also access helpful information on 'Minding Your Wellbeing' –

<https://www2.hse.ie/healthy-you/minding-your-wellbeing-programme.html>

“An empty lantern provides no light. Self-care is the fuel that allows your light to shine brightly.”
– Unknown

Managing Stress

Even just being out of work can be stressful!!

Whether there are issues at work or not, there are actions you can take to manage stress.

First, identify the reasons for stress – there are often more than one.

If work-related, talk to your line manager and complete a stress risk assessment. Agree on actions with your line manager to deal with the stressors, including a referral to Occupational Health if necessary. Keep in regular contact with your line manager.

Whether work-related or not, consider if you need to talk to your GP and/or contact the HSE Employee Assistance Programme to arrange free and confidential counselling.

Consider self-referral to Occupational Health.

Relevant information can be found at these links:

Stress – <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/health-and-safety/work-related-stress/>

Employee Assistance Programme – <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-and-services/employee-assistance-programme-staff-counselling/>

Occupational Health – <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-and-services/occupational-health/management-referral-information-for-employees/>



*Self-care is a
key factor to managing
stress – diet, exercise,
sleep, support!!*

Returning to Work

Did you know that working is good for your health and wellbeing?

It contributes to our happiness, helps us to build confidence and self-esteem, as well as rewarding us financially.

What are the main benefits of work?

- It keeps us busy, challenges us and gives us the means to develop ourselves;
- It gives us a sense of pride, identity and personal achievement;
- It enables us to socialise, build contacts and find support;
- It provides us with money to support ourselves and explore our interests.

It's worth thinking about how you can return to work as soon as possible after an illness or injury, with agreement from your healthcare provider, of course.



*An early return
to work can
help speed up
recovery*

Planning your return

Talk to your healthcare provider about your job – talk about how you can return to work.

- Focus on your ability, but know your limitations. You may be able to continue your recovery at work. In fact, it may even help you recover quicker.
- Follow their advice about your treatment, self-care and rest.

Talk to your line manager about your ability – Discuss successes or issues with recovery – discuss how you can return to work possibly with ‘reasonable accommodations’ in place.

- Is it possible to do modified duties while you continue your recovery?

If attending Occupational Health, talk about how you can return to work.

- Which parts of the job are you fit for?
- What concerns do you have?

Work with your other healthcare providers to plan a return to work – physiotherapist, counsellor, specialist.

Keep everyone updated on progress.

Reasonable accommodations

If you can't do your full job for medical reasons, your line manager may need to consider if they can provide appropriate measures to facilitate your return to work. This is not always possible because of service needs or if it causes a disproportionate burden on the service.

One way of providing reasonable accommodation is by providing modified duties. This is work that will allow you to carry out a version of your usual job or a completely different job, all based on the idea that it is physically or mentally less demanding than your usual job duties. These are usually temporary duties that match your current abilities.

Some examples of modified duties are:

- An office worker who has sustained a back injury may be able to do their usual work with the exception of lifting bundles of files.
- An employee recovering after a serious illness may be able to return on reduced hours, with a plan to gradually increase these hours as their strength and fitness improve.

It's important that you work with your line manager, healthcare providers and Occupational Health service in considering appropriate accommodations that may assist in your return to work.

Engage in the Plan

Once you're deemed fit to return to work, you need to prepare for it.

Meet with your line manager to discuss your return to work.

It may be helpful to use the 'Work Rehabilitation Plan' –

see <https://healthservice.hse.ie/staff/benefits-and-services/occupational-health/rehabilitation/>

Work together – make suggestions, address concerns, be honest, agree a process to review the plan with your line manager.

The plan will be based on Occupational Health and other healthcare providers recommendations, with input from you and your line manager.

- Agree a date of return.
- Consider if you can return to your full role or will be phasing back over a set period.
- Set out how restrictions/adaptations will be put in place and who is responsible for these.
- Set a review date for the plan.

Agree what you want to tell co-workers if their support is required.

- Consider what they need to know. For example that you will need to ask for their help with certain task.
- You don't need to tell them medical information!!

After a long absence it can be helpful to visit the workplace prior to returning to work, just to reengage with everyone.



*Recovery
can be a team
approach*

It's not over yet

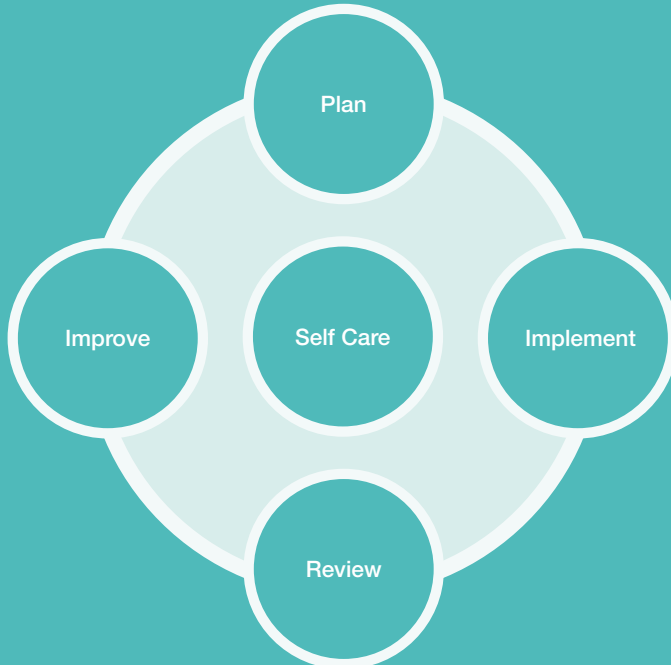
Whether you return to your normal role from day one, or if you return on temporary modified duties, the process isn't finished.

Make sure you and your line manager review the situation at agreed timeframes, or sooner if necessary.

Report successes and identify issues early on.

Do you need more support?

- Talk to your line manager, Occupational Health, Employee Assistance Programme, other healthcare provider.
- Expect it to take a while to settle in.



More information

For further information see

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/workplace-health-and-wellbeing-unit/>

- Health and Safety
- Occupational Health
- Rehabilitation
- Employee Assistance Programme

Other Staff Health and Wellbeing information is available at:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/healthy-ireland/national-policy-priority-programmes/staff-health-and-wellbeing.html>

RELEVANT POLICIES

Attendance Policy

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/managingattendance.pdf>

Rehabilitation of employees back to work after illness or injury policy and procedure

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/hrppg/rehabilitation-of-employees-back-to-work-after-illness-or-injury.html>

Long Term Absence Benefit Schemes Guidelines

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/hrppg/long-term-absence-benefit-schemes-guidelines-december-2012.html>