

Returning to Work

Returning to Work After Injury or Illness

Understanding Your Rights

Under Irish law, employers are obligated to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities or health conditions. These accommodations aim to support your ability to perform your job effectively.

Legal Entitlements and Employer Duties

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, employers in Ireland must:

- Ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, the safety, health, and welfare of employees at work.
- Carry out risk assessments and implement control measures to address hazards — including those related to poor ergonomics (e.g. repetitive strain, poor posture, workstation setup).
- Provide appropriate training and information related to health and safety, including safe use of work equipment.
- Assess Display Screen Equipment (DSE) for anyone using computers or screens for long periods, as required by the Display Screen Equipment Regulations (2007).

What this means in Practise

- If you're returning to work after an injury or illness (especially musculoskeletal or neurological), you can request an ergonomic assessment to ensure your workstation supports your recovery.
- The employer may carry this out internally (via HR, Health & Safety Officer) or engage an external occupational health or ergonomic specialist.

Tips for a
successful
return

- Put your request in writing and, if relevant, include a recommendation from a healthcare provider.
- Start discussions with your employer early to allow time for adjustments.

Examples of Reasonable Accommodations

- **Ergonomic accommodations:** these might include an adjustable chair with proper lumbar support, a standing desk, a footrest or a modified mouse or keyboard.
- **Adjusting work schedules or hours:** A phased or gradual return to work can be highly beneficial. This might involve reduced hours, such as starting with half-days or alternate days, and increasing your schedule over time as your capacity improves.
- **Modifying tasks:** You can also request a reduced workload, prioritising essential tasks only, and temporary changes in responsibilities to avoid physically demanding or high-stress duties.
- Other useful accommodations include more frequent breaks, remote working options, flexible start and end times, modifications to performance targets, or providing additional training or support.

Available Supports in Ireland

Intreo Services:

Operated by the Department of Social Protection, Intreo offers guidance on returning to work and can assist with job-seeking efforts.

Citizens Information:

Can advise on employment rights and social welfare supports.

National Advocacy Service (NAS):

Offers independent advocacy for people with disabilities, assisting in understanding rights and accessing services.

Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant:

Provides funding to employers to make necessary adaptations for employees.

Partial Capacity Benefit:

Supports individuals who have reduced capacity to work due to illness or disability but who wish to return to employment.

Steps to Navigate Workplace Accommodations

Communicate with Your Employer:

Inform your employer about your condition and discuss potential accommodations. Provide medical documentation if necessary.

Develop a Return-to-Work Plan:

Collaborate with your employer to create a plan that outlines your duties, any modifications needed, and a timeline for your return.

Seek Support:

Engage with occupational health professionals or employee assistance programmes for additional guidance.