

Ready to return to work?

This is the first question to ask. Consult with your doctor, your family and friends – what do they think? If you don't have a job to go back to, you can use the time between deciding to return and your first day to make sure that you are making the right choice. If in doubt, think about voluntary work or different ways of working – self employment, job sharing, part-time work, flexible employment, working from home or agency work.

Return to the same job?

Going back to your old job after a time off sick can be difficult. Two things that you can do to make it easier are:

- Get in touch - catch up with changes that have happened whilst you have been away. It will help you fit in more quickly when you return.
- Consider returning on a part-time basis - talk to your boss to negotiate an 'easing back into work' pattern (you could think about permitted work – see below).

... Or a new one?

Changing jobs is difficult, especially if you are forced to because of illness or injury. If you need to find a new direction the Disability Employment Adviser, New Deal for Disabled adviser or nextstep adviser can help. They can talk to you about your skills, interests and experiences and help you match these to a new job and a new challenge.

Do you have a disability?

The Disability Discrimination Act defines a disabled person as one who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Help from the Jobcentre

To find out more about these programmes, please make an appointment to see a Disability Employment Adviser at your local Jobcentre Plus office.

Disability Employment Adviser (DEA): provides specialist support and can refer you to other services listed below. The DEA can also advise if you are currently in work but finding things difficult because of illness or injury.

Access to Work: practical help to overcome obstacles if starting work or already in a job (including self-employment). Access to Work can help to pay for specialist equipment, furniture, communications support or travel to work for example.

Job Introduction Scheme (JIS): if you have found a job but are unsure if it is suitable, the Jobcentre can help the employer with wage or employment costs for the first six weeks. The job can be part-time or full-time but must be expected to last for at least six months after the JIS period expires.

Work Preparation: a short, flexible programme between 6 and 13 weeks, helping you to identify the type of work suitable for you, assess skills and build confidence. Work experience may also be arranged too.

Workstep: worth considering if you are facing more complex barriers to finding or keeping a job. A Job Coach will help you to find suitable work and support you when in work by keeping in touch with both you and your employer.

New Deal for Disabled (NDDP): a voluntary programme, open to people in receipt of disability benefits (see below). A Job Broker offers advice and support about returning to work, including help to identify skills, complete application forms and prepare for interviews. Job Brokers keep in touch with you during your first six months of work, providing a welcome support system.

Permitted Work Rules: allows you to do paid work for less than 16 hours per week for up to 26 weeks (which, under certain circumstances, can be extended) without affecting your benefits. *Permitted work helps you to maintain your skills or learn new ones whilst off work and can ease the transition back to work. *If you are in receipt of means-tested benefits, any earnings will be taken into account.

Benefits

All benefit questions must be discussed with your Jobcentre Plus adviser or Disability Employment Adviser.

Working Tax Credit: a means-tested benefit for people on low incomes, either with or without children and working for 16 hours per week or more.

Disability Living Allowance: if you have a personal care need or walking difficulties. DLA is paid whether you are in work or not.

Other sources of information and advice

As well as the Jobcentre, there are places where you can find information and advice, especially if you are not sure that a return to work is right for you at this time.

Expert Patients Scheme: a six week programme aimed at the self-management of long-term health conditions. Emphasis is placed on taking control, communication and goal setting.

Support groups: established for numerous health conditions. Could be a useful source of advice and a place to meet others and find solutions to problems.

Voluntary Work: can be a great way to decide if you are ready to return to work and, if you have to try a different type of work, to see which may suit you. If in receipt of benefits, it is essential that any voluntary work is discussed with a Jobcentre Plus adviser before commencement.

On the Internet

www.direct.gov.uk – information and advice about benefits, disability and health issues

www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk – more in depth advice about the schemes listed above.

www.drc.org.uk – The Disability Rights Commission website, with information and advice about finding work, discrimination issues and lots more.

BEST Training & NextStep provides information and advice on work and learning to adults 20+ across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole.

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