

# advice for workers with muscle and joint problems

## helping you to stay active and working

### important information

- Activity and work are good for physical and mental health
- Muscle and joint problems are very common – pretty much everyone has them at some stage during their life
- These problems can be distressing and may make life difficult for a while
- Serious disease or injury with lasting damage is very rare
- Most episodes settle quickly, but the symptoms may crop up again
- It's best to stay active and continue working, or get back soon

1

### make a plan to be active and working

The key is communication and action. There are two main issues:

**Recovery** depends on working with the health professionals who are helping you, and on your own motivation and effort. Treatment can help to reduce your symptoms, but you are the one who has to get active – see activity as part of your treatment

**Ask yourself:** What can I do to be a 'coper' and not an 'avoider'?

**Returning to work** depends on you and your employer working together, and that needs communication. The key thing is to stay in touch with the people at work – figure out what's needed to help you return

**Ask yourself:** What obstacles are getting in the way of my going back to work, and who do I need to talk to about overcoming these (through problem-solving and negotiation)

3

### identify obstacles to your recovery

Various things can get in the way of recovery and getting back to work and activity

**Personal obstacles** involve how you feel and think:-

Unhelpful attitudes and beliefs about health and work • Uncertainty  
• Anxiety and depression • Loss of routine and work habits

**Work-related obstacles** can block your return to work:-

Loss of contact with work • Negative attitudes by people at work  
• Lack of job accommodations or modified work • Misunderstandings and disagreements between you, your employer, and doctor/therapist)

**Health-related obstacles** can confuse and delay:-

Conflicting advice • waiting lists • prolonged sick leave • ineffective treatments

### things to watch out for

You are unlikely to recover and return to work if you

- Believe there is something seriously wrong
- Are unable to accept reassurance and help
- Avoid activity in case it makes things worse
- Get withdrawn and depressed
- Are fearful and uncertain about going back to work

The longer you are off work or not doing your usual activities, the harder it is to get back

2

### action!

#### Putting your plan into action:

**Take control** - Take responsibility for your recovery, making best use of available help

**Set realistic goals** - Give yourself a clear timeline for getting back to work and activity. Use weeks, not months

**List what you can do** - Have a 'can-do' approach, and avoid dwelling on what you can't do easily at present. You'll find you can do a lot of things – at work and leisure

**Talk with your health professional** – Discuss what you can do: work out ways to get active and back to work. Give them permission to talk with your employer

**Increase activity** – Do a little more each day for a little longer. Pace yourself: do no more on good days and no less on bad days

**Changing your attitude and improving motivation** – Don't get gloomy or anxious. Getting active will improve your confidence and you'll feel more positive

**Talk with your employer** – If your employer has not been in touch, make the first move. Temporary changes to your job are one of the best ways of making it possible to get back to work: sort out what's needed with your line manager

**Put it all together** – Make sure that you and your doctor and your employer all know what is happening and what you are planning. Tell them you want help to be a coper

4