



A•S•U
Australian Services Union

Injured Worker's Guide to

BEST PRACTICE RETURN TO WORK FOR A STRESS INJURY



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PREVENTING WORK-RELATED STRESS

The burden of workplace stress on employers, organisations and individuals is significant and the best strategy for work-related stress focuses on prevention as the most important objective. To minimise the detrimental effects of stress employers should adopt a systematic approach that focuses on addressing the sources of job stress and preventing it from occurring in the future.

For further information or assistance contact the WorkSafe Advisory Service, your Union or Employer Association or visit the WorkSafe website at www.worksafe.vic.gov.au



Workers suffering from a stress injury need to have relevant, reliable information and support to enable them to fully participate in the return to work process. This document is designed to be a step by step guide so that the worker is better prepared for the complex processes which might accompany their attempts to return to work.

It provides information for injured workers to increase their awareness and understanding so as to promote better communication between all parties. Hopefully this will assist in an optimal recovery from work-related stress injury and an early, safe and sustainable return to work.



Phase 1: Early Intervention

Step 1: Report injury or illness as soon as possible

- ◆ Report all incidents likely to lead to a work related stress injury or illness following workplace procedures for notifying incidents as soon as possible.
- ◆ Keep your own record of the incident and any subsequent events, meetings and interventions.

Step 2: Seek support

- ◆ The most important thing to do if you have a work-related stress injury or illness is to seek appropriate medical treatment.
- ◆ The employer should contact you as soon as practicable after the injury happens and organise a workplace meeting.
- ◆ The employer should identify the return to work (RTW) coordinator and in consultation with you someone who can act as a support person, for example an OHS Representative or union delegate or friend or family support.
- ◆ At the meeting ask your employer about accessing the company support services including the EAP program if there is one.
- ◆ If totally or partly incapacitated for work, lodge a claim for workers compensation as soon as possible. You must register a claim within 30 days of becoming aware of injury or illness. Relevant forms should be available at the workplace.



Phase 2: Claim Lodged

Step 1: Employer to establish contact

- ◆ If you lodge a claim expect to be contacted by the employer to organise a workplace meeting.

Step 2: Meeting with the employer

- ◆ When you are well enough attend a workplace meeting with the nominated RTW coordinator and if you agree, with your manager or supervisor. You can, if you wish, bring your support person.
- ◆ Ask for time out or call a halt to the meeting if you find the meeting too stressful.
- ◆ You or your support person should take notes on what is discussed and agreed to.
- ◆ At the meeting the following topics should be covered:
 1. The injury and what treatment you are receiving. This is not an investigation and the employer should adopt a no fault attitude and focus on your medical treatment and safety.
 2. The process for contacting your doctor.
 3. What assistance is available for paying medical and rehabilitation expenses and weekly compensation until your claim is determined.
 4. An outline of the organisation's Return to Work program and support programs. Think about what assistance you may require.
 5. The causes of the injury and any barriers that may exist to your safe return to work and to eliminating or reducing the risks to your psychological health.
 6. Depending on the severity of your injury a discussion about your possible return to work.



Phase 3: Claim Acceptance

Step 1: Return to Work Planning

- ◆ The employer must prepare a Return to Work (RTW) plan.
- ◆ The RTW plan is a written action plan that outlines how you will be assisted to return to work in a way that is appropriate to your capacity.
- ◆ It must be developed in consultation with, and endorsed, by you and your treating practitioner.
- ◆ You can choose to involve others, such as medical specialists or your support person.
- ◆ It may involve a graduated introduction of working hours and/or duties.
- ◆ In the RTW plan explore ways to prevent a recurrence of the injury or any barriers that may impede your return to work

Step 2: The Offer of Suitable Employment (OSE)

- ◆ In consultation with you, your treating practitioner and if you have one, your occupational rehabilitation provider, the employer must also develop an Offer of Suitable Employment (OSE) including hours and duties.
- ◆ The focus should be on improving/building work capacity. Returning to work, even on alternative duties, is more beneficial than waiting until you have the capacity for returning to your pre-injury role.
- ◆ The Offer of Suitable Employment should identify and clarify key roles and responsibilities, set clear timeframes and be flexible according to your work capacity.
- ◆ Duties should be meaningful, achievable, challenging and within your skill set.

Step 3: Meeting with your treating practitioner

- ◆ If you agree your employer will organise a meeting with your treating doctor at their clinic or at the workplace to consult about strategies that can be adopted to assist you to achieve your return to work goals. You can bring along your support person if you wish.

Step 4: Referral to an occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP)

- ◆ The employer may consider a referral to an occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP) with proven experience in psychological injuries.
- ◆ You should be given a choice of three ORPs by the employer or the Claims Agent.
- ◆ The ORP will liaise directly with all parties including medical practitioners and can facilitate a return to work capacity that best suits your needs.

Step 5: Expect your employer to maintain contact

- ◆ Your employer should maintain regular contact whether it is via a phone call, written information about current activities (company newsletter or updates to all staff via emails) and invitations to visit the workplace regardless of whether you have the capacity for work or not.
- ◆ They should clearly communicate with you their expectations regarding the return to work process, timeframes and accountability.





Phase 4: Return to Work Phase

Step 1: Regular on-going workplace meetings to monitor progress

- ◆ The employer/RTW coordinator should meet with you on the first day of your return and go over the Offer of Suitable Employment. You can bring along your support person if you wish.
- ◆ They should organise another meeting for the end of the week to see how you are progressing.

Step 2: Consultation with other employees and health & safety representatives

- ◆ The employer should provide an explanation to other workers on the situation of the absence, the length of expected absence (if known) and anticipated adjustments in the workplace as part of the RTW plan.
- ◆ They should consult with you about how this communication should occur and if you wish to involve the support person.
- ◆ They should ensure that confidentiality is maintained at all times.
- ◆ They should model positive behaviour within the workplace.

Step 3: Employer to manage the risk or hazard

- ◆ The employer should address the underlying issues relating to the claim to manage the risk of further injury to you and other workers.
- ◆ This means considering any changes that can be implemented to allow you to return to work successfully. They should consider workplace modifications such as changes to the physical environment, putting in place a support team, implementing graduated hours.
- ◆ The employer should consult with the health & safety representative about any proposed changes.

The Return to Work plan should include strategies for ensuring that the plan remains relevant to you, your state of health and gradually builds to normal pre-injury duties.

Phase 5: Monitoring & revising the Return to Work plan

Step 1: Regular meetings with management, worker, supervisors, and other interested parties

- ◆ Return to work monitoring should take place after the first day, then at a minimum, weekly for the duration of the RTW plan for the first month. It may be possible to decrease the frequency of the meetings as you get closer to achieving the return to work goal.
- ◆ Prior to each meeting think about any issues you might want to raise and anything you might want to change.
- ◆ You may choose to involve your support person in these meetings.

Step 2: Regular communication with your treating practitioner

- ◆ Whenever you visit your treating practitioner or medical specialist the return to work plan should be reviewed.
- ◆ It is essential that before implementing a change to the plan your employer should consult with and have agreement from you, your treating practitioner and ORP if involved.

Step 3: Regular checking of the plan & being alert to the need for changes to the plan

- ◆ It is vital with a stress injury that you look out for signs of recurrence or aggravation of the injury and if that does occur let your employer know immediately.
- ◆ It is also important to identify and let your employer know any increased capacity to return to pre-injury duties.
- ◆ Any change to the RTW plan should be done in consultation with you, your support person, treating practitioner and ORP if involved.

Step 4: Post Claim evaluation

- ◆ Assess the success or otherwise of the return to work process and give feedback to your employer on ways of improving the process for the future.
- ◆ Celebrate your achievement of the return to work goals.
- ◆ Think about whether you need ongoing support.

For more information or assistance contact the WorkSafe Advisory Service, your Union or Employer Association or visit the WorkSafe website at www.worksafe.vic.gov.au



Step by step checklist for the injured worker to best practice return to work

PHASE 1: EARLY INTERVENTION

- **Step 1:** Report injury or illness as soon as possible
- **Step 2:** Seek workplace support

PHASE 2: CLAIM LODGED

- **Step 1:** Employer to establish contact
- **Step 2:** Meeting with the employer

PHASE 3: CLAIM ACCEPTANCE

- **Step 1:** Return to Work Planning
- **Step 2:** Employer to develop the Offer of Suitable Employment (OSE)
- **Step 3:** Employer to meet with your treating practitioner
- **Step 4:** Referral to an occupational rehabilitation provider (ORP)
- **Step 5:** Expect you employer to maintain contact

PHASE 4: RETURN TO WORK PHASE

- **Step 1:** Regular on-going workplace meetings to monitor progress
- **Step 2:** Consultation with other employees and health & safety representatives
- **Step 3:** Employer to manage the risk or hazard

PHASE 5: MONITORING & REVISING THE RETURN TO WORK PLAN

- **Step 1:** Regular meetings with management, worker, supervisors, and other interested parties
- **Step 2:** Employer to maintain regular communication with your treating practitioner
- **Step 3:** Regular checking of the plan & being alert to the need for changes to the plan
- **Step 4:** Post Claim evaluation

Key Contacts

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RTW Coordinator

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Support person

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Occupational Health & Safety Representative

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Union Delegate

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Treating Practitioner

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Medical Specialist

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Occupational Rehabilitation Provider

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Claim's Agent





Please note that the Victorian Accident Compensation Act 1985 has been reviewed and significant changes to the return to work provisions are being proposed. Consequently once the legislation is enacted some of the steps in the best practice guide will no longer be applicable and will be rewritten.



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