

Returning to work after an illness

At a glance

- It's quite normal for a return to work after a long period of sickness absence to seem daunting.
- Before you return, ask your doctor what you are able to do, and check your company's policies with your HR department.
- If you need to, decide on a back-to-work strategy with your employer to ensure you get the right support.

Returning to work after illness

Returning to work after a long period of sickness absence can feel quite daunting. You may worry whether you'll be able to cope with the physical demands of a full day's work. Or feel dread at the prospect of returning to a desk overflowing with paperwork and emails. This fact sheet explains what happens when you return to the office, and some of the choices available to you. So you can make your return as comfortable and happy as possible.

Before you return

Before you commit to returning to work, speak to your doctor. Ask whether they think you're fit to return to full duties, or whether their recommendation to return to work is conditional. Most organizations will have some form of return-to-work procedure. So it might be sensible to get in touch with your manager or HR department before you return to check what your employer's policies are.



When you return

Your company may ask for a return-to-work interview. This is an opportunity for you both to look back at the period of illness. Your employer may want to find out if your working environment played any part in your ill health.

An interview is also an opportunity to look forward. You can reassure your company that you are fully recovered and eager to take on a full work load. Or you might want to explain any fears you have that a heavy workload may push you back to square one.



Deciding on a back-to-work strategy

Your employer may be willing to work out with you some kind of back-to-work strategy, including:

- A period of part-time working
- An agreement that a colleague will help with some of your tasks for a while
- If your illness has left you with a measure of disability, you may need changes made to your working environment
- You may also ask for advice from your Occupational Health team

It's quite normal for the prospect of returning to work to seem daunting after a time away, especially if you have been unwell. But with the right support, you can work out what is realistic to expect and how you can work with your employer to ensure your return is as smooth and successful as possible for you all.



Critical support when you need it

Visit optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter for additional critical support resources and information.



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