



Long COVID Service

Return to work

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Long COVID symptoms could affect your ability to work or cause lengthy periods of sickness absence. The symptoms may also come and go, which may cause some anxiety and stress, especially around returning to work. The Equality Act 2010 states: 'A person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

If Long COVID symptoms, have a substantial adverse impact on you, which affect your ability to carry out your day-to-day activities, and the impairment has lasted or is likely to last for 12 months, then it could fall within the definition of a disability under the Equality Act. The employee should not be treated less favourably as a result of that condition, and the duty to make reasonable adjustments would be triggered.

It is recognised that:

- Work is good for health
- Interventions that support return to work are cost effective
- Your employer is then expected to make reasonable adjustments to assist you

Ongoing symptoms

It is important to keep in touch with your manager when you are on sickness absence and explain the impact of ongoing symptoms. These may include:

- Breathlessness
- Fatigue
- Pain
- Cognitive processing such as focusing or attending on tasks, difficulties switching from one task to another, information processing, speed of work, remembering and/or processing information
- Low mood and/or anxiety
- Insomnia, etc.



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Timing your return to work

Before returning to work, it is important to ensure you are able to manage a consistent level of activity and have a structure to do this. You may explore this with your health care professional who will be able to guide you. Begin by asking yourself, will any tasks at work trigger or increase your symptoms? Can you think of any solutions that may help?

If your employer has an Occupational Health Department, it would be a good idea to see them and agree a plan around your return to work.

It can be helpful to make suggestions based on your experience, the knowledge of your job and tasks and your health condition.

What are reasonable adjustments?

- **Phased returns** can help you gradually build up your work activities, allow you to transfer your management strategies to your workplace and enable continued recovery.
- **Altered hours** e.g. shorter days, non-consecutive working days, coming in to work later to avoid long periods in traffic.
- **Procedure / how the job is done** e.g. changing the order of tasks or time spent on tasks, verbal instructions changed to emailed instructions to facilitate fewer distractions and better concentration.
- **Consider work environment** e.g. use ergonomic equipment, sitting in a quieter office, working on the ground floor to reduce the use of stairs. Working from home where possible might be helpful.
- **Patterns of working** e.g. the need for regular breaks or altered workload.
- **Support** such as a 'buddy', developing cues to let colleagues know when you need to concentrate.
- **Time off for appointments**



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Further Resources

- https://www.som.org.uk/COVID-19_return_to_work_guide_for_recovering_workers.pdf
- **Access to work:** Can help employers to get funds to apply for funding to pay for items or services the employee may require. www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply
- <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/work/discrimination-at-work/taking-action/asking-your-employer-for-changes-to-help-if-youre-disabled>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fit-note-guidance-for-employers-and-line-managers/getting-the-most-out-of-the-fit-note-guidance-for-employers-and-line-managers#possible-changes>
- Short videos created by OT/Physio team in Derby. Can be really helpful for patients around work.
 - Managing COVID related symptoms during sickness absence: <https://youtu.be/3fHeLbDo40U>
 - Return to work rehabilitation: <https://youtu.be/29KcxHJb4qU>
 - Managing ongoing COVID related symptoms in the workplace: <https://youtu.be/JNUBmWJgFms>
 - Supporting staff with ongoing COVID related symptoms to return to work: advice for managers: <https://youtu.be/bryRdjlzqRM>
- www.yourcovidrecvoery.nhs.uk
- www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus