

Advice for line managers on supporting employees with long-term medical conditions

This guide provides advice to employers and line managers on supporting employees with long-term (also called chronic) medical conditions through practical solutions that will benefit both you and your employees.

What are long-term medical conditions?

Long-term conditions are conditions that can not be cured but can be managed through medication and/or therapy. They include a broad range of medical issues, for example asthma, diabetes, cancer and arthritis. Advances in treatment and an ageing population mean that many more people with a long-term condition are able to continue working.

Although long-term medical problems may continue over many years, remaining in work can help to reduce their impact.

For further guidance on living with a long-term condition, please visit www.nhs.uk/Planners/Yourhealth/Pages/Yourhealth.aspx

A list of common major long-term conditions accompanies this leaflet.

Practical steps

Simple facts

If someone has a long-term medical condition, it is generally better for him or her to be working if possible. Research shows that people with long-term conditions find that getting back to work is often helpful to their recovery. Simple adjustments at work can make a big difference in helping the person to stay at work.

The employee may well know what they need

Nowadays, most patients fully understand their condition and will usually know what they need to help them cope, but they may be reluctant to engage with their employer about accommodating them.

Clear communications are important

It will help both you and your employee to have an open and practical discussion about what adjustments can be made to ensure a return to work. If the employee feels



uncomfortable about doing this, you might suggest they bring a colleague, union representative or friend with them. The discussion should focus on what practical changes are necessary to meet the individual's needs.

Getting the balance right gives you a win win

If you are able to reach a balance between the employee's health issues and the work they are able to do, this will improve their productivity and attendance, and the quality of their work, as well as helping improve their health and making them feel valued.

Understanding the needs makes planning easier

You should always encourage your employees to tell you about any health needs they might have, even if they have no previous history of illness.

Keeping in touch makes life easier

Keeping in contact during periods of prolonged sickness is important and benefits both line managers and employees. You should maintain regular contact rather than wait until the employee has returned.

For further guidance on getting support at work, please visit www.nhs.uk/Planners/Yourhealth/Pages/Gettingsupportatwork.aspx

Take the lead and show you care

Someone with a medical condition may appreciate an offer of help to be able to carry on working. However, such discussions should take place in private and be treated in confidence. In some situations, the conversation may also help in developing formal return-to-work or job-retention plans.

Employees with medical conditions may have statutory protection requiring their employers to make work and workplace adjustments. However, whether or not this is the case, it is good practice to do what you can to meet your employees' needs in this respect.

Adjustments may include:

- ergonomic adjustments (changing your work environment)
- changes to working hours
- flexible working practices
- changing the way your employee works (for example, allowing them to have more breaks)
- using equipment that may help reduce the demands on your employee
- phased return to work after sickness absence
- adjusting performance targets
- redistributing work

In many cases, such changes are cheap and easy to make. Where a medical condition causes disability, grants may be available to help employers make such adjustments (for example via [Access to Work](#)).

Legislation supporting those with a disability will also apply to many with long-term medical conditions. This includes accommodating visits to hospitals or other medical appointments.

Ideally, employees should not normally be required to take annual leave for matters relating to their long-term condition, such as medical appointments, but employers should discuss all the options.

Implementing changes

You can find advice on how to talk sensitively to people with long-term conditions from the specialist groups listed in the appendix.

It's important to bear in mind that long-term medical conditions cover both physical and mental ill health and prompt, supportive, empathetic care is valuable in improving outcomes.

Follow up

Medical issues can change over time, so it is important for managers to monitor progress and check that arrangements remain appropriate. This may be either formal (for example, regular review meetings) or simply an informal chat.

Sources of advice

Employees returning to work after sickness may have received advice from their GP or other medical practitioner. The new Statement of Fitness for Work (fit note) may also include recommendations on adjustments at work.

Occupational health advice may be useful in dealing with long-term medical conditions at work and employees should be encouraged to get in touch with their local OH specialist.

Human resource specialists are also important sources of advice. In addition, national occupational health advice lines now exist – these are found in the accompanying list.

Excellent support organisations exist for most major common long-term diseases and produce material for both employers and employees.

These can be found online and we recommend that all line managers access them. A list of examples accompanies this leaflet.

Further sources of information

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/workplacehealth/Pages/Workplacehome.aspx

www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/category.aspx?CategoryID=190

An employee version of this document is also available for use in conversations with your employee (www.nhs.uk/Livewell/workplacehealth/Documents/ChronicConds_Employees_Factsheet_A4.pdf)

The following websites offer information and advice on long-term medical conditions:

Arthritis	Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Association Arthritis Care NHS Choices Arthritis Research	www.arma.uk.net www.arthritiscare.org.uk www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Osteoarthritis/Pages/living-with.aspx http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/arthritis_daily_life/working_with_arthritis.aspx
Asthma	Asthma Asthma UK	www.asthma.org.uk www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Asthma/Pages/living-with.aspx
Cancer	Macmillan Cancer Support NHS Choices	www.macmillan.org.uk/work www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Cancer/Pages/Cancerhome
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	British Lung Foundation NHS Choices	www.lunguk.org www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Chronic-obstructive-pulmonary-disease/Pages/living-with.aspx
Colitis and Crohn's disease	National Association for Colitis and Crohn's Disease	http://www.nacc.org.uk/downloads/factsheets/employers.pdf
Dementia	NHS Choices	www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Dementia/Pages/living-with.aspx
Diabetes	Diabetes UK NHS Choices	www.diabetes.org.uk www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Diabetes-type2/Pages/Living-with.aspx
Epilepsy	NHS Choices Epilepsy UK	www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Epilepsy/Pages/living-with.aspx http://www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/employment
Heart disease	NHS Choices British Heart Foundation	www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Coronary-heart-disease/Pages/Recovery.aspx http://www.bhf.org.uk/healthatwork/
Kidney disease	NHS Choices	www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Kidney-disease-chronic/Pages/living-with.aspx
Mental health	NHS Choices	www.nhs.uk/livewell/mentalhealth/Pages/Mentalhealthhome.aspx
Multiple Sclerosis Society	MS Society	http://www.mssociety.org.uk/about_ms/employment/index.html
Parkinson's	Parkinson's UK	http://www.parkinsons.org.uk/advice/living-with_parkinsons/employment.aspx

The following websites offer general advice for line managers, employers or union representatives on workplace health, safety and wellbeing:

Health and Safety Executive	http://www.hse.gov.uk/business/index.htm
Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service	http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1361
Trades Union Congress	http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm
Business Link	http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/