

The Fit Note: Crib sheet for comments and possible job modifications taken from BMJ 2010;341:c6305

Examples of modifications that may help a patient to return to work

- Phased return to work

The patient could restart with reduced working hours and build up gradually to normal levels. Working fewer hours each day is usually preferable to fewer days each week

- Altered hours

Consider the time of work as well as the number of hours a day—for example, a patient recovering from depression may find early starts especially difficult

- Amended duties

Changes in the organisation of work might help: an anxious patient with reduced confidence may benefit from working in a team rather than alone; a secretary with rheumatoid arthritis who found typing difficult could be allocated alternative administrative duties if colleagues were available to share in the work

Changes in job content might help: a patient with back pain may need to avoid prolonged sitting to reduce discomfort; a patient with anxiety or depression may need to avoid tight deadlines; a patient with newly diagnosed insulin dependent diabetes may need to avoid foreign travel temporarily

- Workplace adaptation

Changes to seating or other aspects of a work station may be necessary to improve comfort in a patient with back pain

A patient with an arthritic left ankle may need to switch to a car with automatic gears

Examples of advice for an employer about a patient's function and possible job modifications

- “He should avoid lifting weights greater than 10 kg. Might it be possible for him to transfer temporarily to work in customer service?”
- “She should avoid prolonged sitting without breaks. Review of her work station might be useful. She will need time off twice a week to attend physiotherapy”
- “She cannot currently drive a car. So that she can use public transport it would help if she could start and finish work a little later than normal”
- “He should avoid kneeling and squatting”
- “She could manage work that does not involve handling customer complaints”

Specific Comments to Consider – Employed

Musculoskeletal

‘Can do’ comments:

- Desk-based duties possible
- Fit for any walking or seated duties
- Upper limbs have full function

‘Avoid’ comments:

- Avoid loaded rotation at the trunk
- Avoid manual work above shoulder height
- Avoid lifting from the floor

Mental Health

Can do” comments:

- Is a workplace mentor available?
- Can working hours be adjusted?
- Please consider reported workplace relationship issue
- Consider advice on <https://returntoworkmh.co.uk/>
 - Paste link into all fit notes where mental health is an issue

“Avoid” comments:

- Can he/she avoid customer-facing duties?
- Can he/she avoid tight deadlines?
- Can he/she re-locate for in the short-term?