

Implement a Return-to-Work Program for Your Injured Workers

[Including Health Care Workers]

Early return-to-work programs have proven highly effective in containing and reducing the costs of workers' compensation for employers – including health care and nursing home employers.

An important part of a return-to-work program is to identify possible alternate jobs that are medically authorized for an injured worker to perform. It may be referred to as: Modified Duty, Alternate Duty, Limited, Restricted or Transitional work. These terms are used synonymously and refer to duty that is intended to be time-limited, temporary, productive and meaningful.

Two important forms are crucial to the process

First, you must have the treating physician medically authorize/document and release the injured worker for light duty. Give the treating physician a completed **"Job Analysis Form"** which will help the doctor to better understand the job duties and physical demands of the employee's job functions.

In return, have the treating physician complete a **"Physician's Evaluation Form"** detailing the physical limitations of the injured employee. These completed forms will guide you in identifying alternate duty tasks. Both of these forms are available from the IWIF website under "Forms and Publications."

Types of injuries

Injured workers with the following types of temporary injuries could possibly perform various types of alternate jobs:

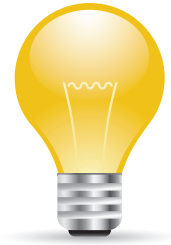
Soft tissue back injury – the employee is able to walk, sit or stand and use his/her arms and hands, but no heavy lifting.

Ankle/foot/leg injury – the employee cannot stand for long periods of time or walk, but in a seated position, some transitional duty could be performed.

Shoulder/arm/or hand injury – job tasks that require using only one hand could possibly be performed.

Ideas for building your own "Alternate Duty Job Bank"

1. Answering the telephone
2. Filing paperwork
3. Taking inventory (but not physically moving inventory stock)
4. Supply room/storage checkout
5. Placing purchase orders by phone, fax, e-mail, etc.
6. Greeter/receptionist/front desk assistant
7. Computer data entry work
8. Assembly of materials for patients
9. Help with social activities for the patients (bingo games, for example)
10. Help with meal time feeding for the patients
11. Outgoing mail stuffing, applying postage
12. Incoming mail opening, mail bin distribution
13. Making photocopies or shredding documents
14. Light stocking of supplies for bathrooms & kitchens
15. Help with safety inspections, job site safety monitoring
16. Teacher/instructor (Many times you may have experienced employees who are injured who may be able to return to work teaching younger or less experienced employees.)



What other tasks/jobs can you think of in your workplace? Be creative with identifying alternate job tasks.

Schedule a meeting of supervisors and employees to suggest alternate duty jobs. Encourage everyone to come up with as many suggestions as possible, even if initially they may think the ideas are unrealistic. The way to come up with a couple good ideas is to have a lot of possible ideas. Be creative and look at what meaningful work/job tasks need to be done in your workplace. List the physical activities for each task, as this will assist the physician in understanding the work.

Frequently asked questions about return-to-work

1. What if the injured worker is medically released and able to perform transitional duty work, but refuses to come back to work? If duty is available that meets the restrictions provided by the physician and the injured worker elects not to accept the transitional job, the injured worker's benefits maybe jeopardized. IMPORTANT: This is often determined on a case-by-case basis. Return-to-work involves a number of issues particular to each claim. Please contact your claims adjuster for guidance with your specific claims and return-to-work questions.

2. What if my injured worker is medically released for transitional duty, but the injury prevents him/her from driving a vehicle? Can I, as the employer, arrange for and provide transportation? Yes. This is a good practice to aid the injured worker to return to the job. Remember to please use safe and reliable transportation if offering to transport the injured worker to your workplace. Note: Recognize that if a vehicle accident occurs to or from work and your employee is further injured, that may become part of the workers' compensation claim. ■

Need help with building a return-to-work program? Please contact the IWIF Loss Control department or your IWIF Claims Adjuster.



Continue online to learn more. Get dozens of ideas for transitional work as well as potential task lists for RN's, LPN's, CNA's and other health care staff. Visit iwif.com under Helpful Articles.