



Returning to Work

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Following Encephalitis some people may find they are able to return to their occupation with little or no adjustment. However, many people will not be able to return to work without a structured programme of rehabilitation and training.

Returning to work can be hampered by many things, such as memory problems, tiredness, mood swings, behavioural constraints, reduced organisational skills, finances, personal or family worries and stress, prejudices of potential employers etc.

People who are considering a return to work must ensure that they do not return too soon. A return to work too early in your recovery is likely to end in failure.

Think about whether you want to return to work. Can you afford to return to work and can you travel easily? Think seriously about whether you are fit for work. Will it stress or tire you too much? You may want to consider part-time work initially.

Be Realistic!

Consider the ways you could commence a return to work and choose realistically. Do you want to return to your old job or consider a different or new job? Will you require support in your employment or do you need re-training? Perhaps you want to develop your hobbies or choose voluntary work?

Identify what skills and activities you are good at. You may find that you have not retained some previous skills and that you need to re-learn them, or you may have acquired new skills.

Get together with family and friends - make a list of all the things you are good at and enjoy doing, and make a list of all the things you are good at and enjoy doing, and all the things you cannot do as well as before.

Whatever occupation or job you choose, you are most likely to succeed, if:-

- It is similar to that which you did before.
- see initial entry to work as part of your rehabilitation and do not place too much emphasis on financial reward. Work is not just about money; it is about structure, purpose, developing skills, restoring confidence and self-esteem.
- It does not place too high demands on you physically and mentally.
- It is compatible with any mood swings, emotional or behavioural problems.
- You are provided with support and supervision (see Mentoring section below).
- You have access to flexible working hours and working conditions.
- You are able to easily and safely access your job.

Mentoring or Buddying

This involves having someone acting as a memory aid, and providing advice and support until you feel that you can work confidently on your own. You will need the co-operation of your employer. Your mentor can be a colleague or someone who has learnt the job and has been provided by a statutory or voluntary agency in order to assist in your return to work. Your mentor will need to know what you were like before your illness, what effects your illness has caused and how to deal with them. You will need to be open to receiving guidance and feedback from your mentor. The aim is for the mentor to withdraw as soon as you are able to work independently.

Getting Started

Make contact with your employer/previous employer.

Keep them up-to-date with your progress; they are more likely to co-operate.
Consider any risks before you begin work, enabling your employer to provide a safe working environment and meet any health and safety responsibilities.
Discuss the possibilities of mentoring (see above).
Agree a gentle and structured plan for returning to work.
Negotiate regular times for review so that steps back/forward in the plan are mutual.
Involve your occupational health department or trade union if you have one.

Approaching a potential new employer can be a daunting task.

Concentrate on what you can do rather than what you can't; make the most of your abilities on application forms and at interviews
Ask for written feedback or if you felt you handled anything badly, write it down, and use this information to improve.
View all applications/interviews positively – as practice for the next one.
Don't take rejection personally – there is lots of competition in the job market.
Find out about the employer or job that you are pursuing.
Organise any special arrangements – travel, access to the building, interpreter, etc.
Role-play interviews with family and friends.

Look out for employers who use the 'Positive about Disabled People' Logo – your Jobcentre will know which employers use the symbol.

Check newspapers, professional directories and magazines at your local library for adverts.
The Internet may be another source of information.
Talk to people – friends, family, and contacts from former jobs or training - they may have heard about a job or may know someone who could use your skills.

If you are successful in securing a job, remember that few employers are familiar with problems faced by people who have had Encephalitis.
Arrange a pre-job visit to familiarise yourself with routines and the location of certain places, such as toilets, your work desk, the canteen etc.
Take someone who has worked closely with you on your return to work; they may spot something you don't or they could take notes for you.

Additional Help

PACT (Placement Assessment and Counselling Team)

You can apply to this team for an employment assessment by the Occupational Psychologist. This can be accessed via the Disability Employment Advisor (DEA) at your local Jobcentre. Help may then be available in the form of Work Preparation programmes and eventually, Training for Work to help you return to the workplace.

Rehabilitation Centres - Contact Rehab UK (0208 896 2333). They aim to provide training and support programmes for people who have completed their medical rehabilitation but who are not yet ready to enter the employment market.

There may be other rehabilitation centres in your area that include a 'return to work' programme. For further information contact The Encephalitis Support Group.

Accessing Adult Education can provide opportunities to develop your social and organisational skills as well as learning new skills that may aid your return to work.

Contact local colleges, universities, adult education centres - ask them to send their current prospectus. If you claim benefits, many courses are offered at very reduced prices and in some cases are free!

Contact The Open University and The Open Learning Centre - you can study where and when convenient for you and at your own pace.

Voluntary Work - Contact your local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS).

They should be able to help you find voluntary work locally which encompasses your skills and interests. Volunteers are always needed!

Self Employment – Contact your local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC's). They offer information, advice and training including business information, advice and courses in business skills.

Jobcentres provide a wealth of advice and information. They have access to disability officers trained in helping people who are attempting a return to work. Among other things they can:

- Negotiate with employers.
- Arrange for special equipment to be provided or buildings to be altered.
- Arrange supported employment, a support worker or work rehabilitation.
- Opportunities to try out a job for an introductory period.
- Help with the expense of job hunting and travel costs.
- Provide training in new or basic skills such as reading, writing, maths.
- Advise on finance, protecting or accessing benefits, and travel costs.

Contact Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities (0207 481 2727). A charity founded by 10 major employers such as IBM and Midland Bank. They aim, through training, preparation and guidance, to help people with disabilities to secure and maintain worthwhile employment matched to their talents and aspirations.

Declaring Disabilities or Epilepsy.

It is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against a disabled person unless they have good reason. Employers have to make reasonable adjustments if this removes disadvantages for a disabled applicant or employee.

Telling an employer in the beginning does mean there is nothing to bring out later, so you both know where you stand. Some people leave it until their interview so they can deal with any concerns face-to-face.

It is important to remember that if you are asked whether you have a health problem or disability, you must answer in a straightforward way. Explain if it would affect you in a work environment or that it has no practical effect. Emphasise your abilities and why you think you are the person for the job.

People with epilepsy must inform their employer, allowing them to fulfil their part in the Health and Safety at Work Act. If an accident could be caused at work because of your disability or epilepsy then you must declare it – otherwise you could be held legally responsible.

If you mislead your employer it could make them concerned about trusting you or you could be dismissed for providing false information. You may also lose some of your legal rights relating to the Disability Discrimination Act or unfair dismissal.

Finally, and most important of all, **DON'T GIVE UP!**

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