

Speak up (handout for workers)

Why is it important?

Making a workers' compensation claim involves you in a system which was set up to support you medically and financially while you recover and return to your usual job (or other suitable employment).

Unfortunately, that same system can leave you feeling discouraged and powerless.

You might be:

- Worried about your injury or illness
- Afraid of getting sicker or hurting yourself again
- Other aspects of your life may be causing stress
- Not understanding the instructions you have been given
- Not getting any better
- Stuck on modified duties which don't feel quite right
- Leave you feeling as though you are 'a number' rather than a person

What needs to happen?

The best way of dealing with this situation is to:

1. Speak up.
2. Make sure that everyone involved in your return to work plan has a good understanding of both what you can do, and how much effort your workplace responsibilities actually involve.
3. Ask your employer or doctor about what support is available before you're at the end of your tether.

How does it happen?

Speak up

There are lots of reasons you might think it's better to stay quiet, for example:

- You don't think your concerns are relevant to your health problem, or to the workplace.
- You're worried about rocking the boat, for example by expressing concerns about your modified duties.
- Someone in the workplace is making things difficult, and you don't want to make the situation worse.
- You don't trust your supervisor.

However, staying quiet can actually cause more problems:

- Your employer and the other people involved in your claim / return to work might notice that you have concerns but misinterpret them, thinking that you don't actually want to be part of the process.
- You might hurt yourself again, or delay recovery.
- You might be worrying yourself unnecessarily, and if you spoke up a doctor might be able to reassure you that you are not, for example, in danger of re-injury.
- You might be missing out on help that could make your life a whole lot easier.

Remember: it is completely normal for your recovery to be impacted by things that don't have anything to do with work, or your injury / illness.

Experts in the field of workers' compensation and return to work believe that medical issues are just one of many factors which influence how quickly and successfully people recover from injury and get back to

work. If troubles at home, conflict at work or fears about the future are weighing on your mind, chances are they're affecting your recovery too.

Talk to someone you trust about your concerns, such as your GP, your supervisor or your RTW Coordinator. There is a lot of support out there – but, if you don't speak up, you may never hear about it.

Explain your job in detail and tell people what you CAN do

Modified duties play an important role in getting you back to work quickly and safely. Your doctor has probably never been to your workplace however, and your supervisor probably isn't a medical expert, so it can be hard to strike a balance between keeping you safe and keeping you active.

All requirements of the job need to be listed and examined in the context of your injury, not just the main duties. If an injured worker is cleared to lift 10kg for example, what impact would pushing a trolley have?

Problems can also occur when medical restrictions are too restrictive. When recovering workers are spending their days feeling bored, frustrated and unproductive, it can delay recovery. In most instances, staying active promotes rehabilitation.

Problems like these are likely to go unsolved unless you draw them to someone's attention.

Ask about support before you're at the end of your tether

Injured workers should seek help as soon as needed, to prevent problems from spiraling out of control.

Talk to your doctor and your workplace, and if you need more assistance, ask them what is available. Don't be afraid to ask for support.

ⁱ Rehabilitation is the process of helping a person back to their former abilities and quality of life (or as close as possible) after injury or a medical condition.