



MOORE THAN ARTHRITIS | FREE RESOURCE

Returning to Work After Sickness Absence

Build a safe, realistic and reviewable return.



WORKPLACE INCLUSION Practical, respectful and evidence-informed guidance for sustainable work.

Supporting People | Raising Awareness | Building Community | Living Beyond the Diagnosis

Stronger together. Beyond limits.

General workplace information - not individual medical or legal advice | Version 1.0 | August 2026



Returning to Work After Sickness Absence

Build a safe, realistic and reviewable return.

KEY MESSAGE A successful return is a process, not a single date. Duties, hours, travel and recovery may need to build gradually.

Readiness Consider function, treatment, travel and recovery.	Fit note Use advice as a starting point for discussion.	Phased return Build hours or duties over an agreed period.
Adjustments Address disability-related barriers separately where needed.	Communication Agree appropriate contact and confidentiality.	Review Change the plan if it is too demanding or no longer needed.

Scope This resource offers general workplace information. It cannot determine whether a person is legally disabled or what is reasonable in a specific case.



What can make workplace inclusion harder

Look beyond diagnosis labels to the interaction between the person, the role, the environment and workplace systems.

Return at full pace Hours and workload rise too quickly.	Unclear pay Reduced hours or duties are not discussed in writing.	No task plan The employee returns to the original barrier.
Backlog pressure Accumulated work overwhelms the return.	No check-ins Problems continue until another absence.	Stigma Colleagues are told too much or too little without agreement.

AVOID ASSUMPTIONS Individual experience, role demands and effective support vary.



Actions that may reduce disadvantage

Use a person-centred discussion and competent advice where needed. Adjustments should be effective, proportionate and reviewable.

Meet before return Discuss timing, tasks, contact and support.	Prioritise safely Remove backlog expectations and non-essential pressure.	Specify the phase Record hours, duties, location and dates.
Confirm pay Put any temporary pay arrangement in writing.	Schedule reviews Use frequent early check-ins.	Plan sustainability Move from temporary return support to ongoing adjustments.

Confidentiality Agree what information may be shared, with whom and for what practical purpose. Health information requires particular protection.



From first conversation to review

A consistent process improves trust, accountability and the chance that support works in practice.

1. Review health and work information
2. Meet and agree the initial plan
3. Confirm hours, duties, pay and contacts
4. Begin the phased or adjusted return
5. Review early and regularly
6. Agree ongoing arrangements

Questions for the conversation

- What work outcome matters most?
- Which task, practice or environment creates the barrier?
- What has helped or made things harder before?
- Which options should be tried or assessed?
- Who will act, by when, and when will we review?

Keep it practical Record the decision, reason, action owner, target date, confidentiality agreement and review point.



Use this page to prepare or record action

Complete only the fields that are relevant. Keep personal health information secure and share it only through appropriate routes.

1. Proposed return date:

2. Initial hours/location:

3. Temporary duties or limits:

4. Pay arrangement confirmed by:

5. First review date:

6. Ongoing adjustment to consider:

Action record Decision: _____ Owner: _____ Target date:

Review date: _____ Measure of success:



Use the right route for the issue

Workplace inclusion can involve equality law, employment rights, health and safety, data protection, HR policy and medical care. One conversation may not resolve every part.

Important A fit note provides advice; it does not remove the need for a workplace discussion, risk assessment or consideration of reasonable adjustments.

Appropriate next steps may include

- Review the adjustment or work plan with the employee and manager
- Use HR, occupational health, health and safety or Access to Work where appropriate
- Seek medical advice for new, severe or worsening health symptoms
- Use a union, Acas, Citizens Advice or independent legal advice for employment concerns
- Call 999 for a life-threatening emergency or use NHS 111 for urgent medical help that is not an emergency

Jurisdiction Equality Act 2010 information in this resource applies to England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland has separate disability-discrimination legislation and support routes.



Trusted workplace information

Use current primary guidance and obtain professional advice for the facts of an individual case.

- [1] **Acas - Phased returns.** Planning and reviewing a phased return. [Open source](#)
- [2] **GOV.UK - Fit note guidance for employers.** Using fit-note advice in work discussions. [Open source](#)
- [3] **Acas - Disability-related absence.** Managing absence and return fairly. [Open source](#)
- [4] **GOV.UK - Reasonable adjustments.** Duties and practical examples for disabled workers. [Open source](#)
- [5] **HSE - Employers duties and adjustments.** Workplace safety and disability adjustments. [Open source](#)

Evidence checked: 21 August 2026. Review sooner if UK employment, equality, health or data-protection guidance changes.

Related Moore Than Arthritis workplace resources

- Talking to Your Employer About Arthritis
- Reasonable Adjustments in Practice
- Managing Pain, Fatigue and Flare-Ups at Work
- Line Manager Support Toolkit
- Workplace Accessibility Self-Assessment Toolkit

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Disclaimer This resource provides general educational information and is not medical, occupational-health, employment or legal advice. Moore Than Arthritis does not determine disability status, employment rights or the reasonableness of an adjustment. Obtain advice from an appropriately qualified professional about individual circumstances.

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