

Navigating a Return to Work after Cancer

Living Well With and Beyond Cancer Conference 2022

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Overview

- Cancer and Employment in Ireland
- Employment Rights and Entitlements
- Managing Cancer-Related Fatigue at Work
- Phased Return to Work
- Managing Cognitive Symptoms at Work
- Ergonomics – Organising your Workspace
- Assessing Readiness to Return to Work



Cancer & Employment in Ireland



Returning to Employment following a Diagnosis of Cancer – February 2021

Average length of time off work: 40 weeks (0-240 weeks)

Can vary depending on many factors including cancer site and treatment.

Main reasons to return to work:

38% Financial

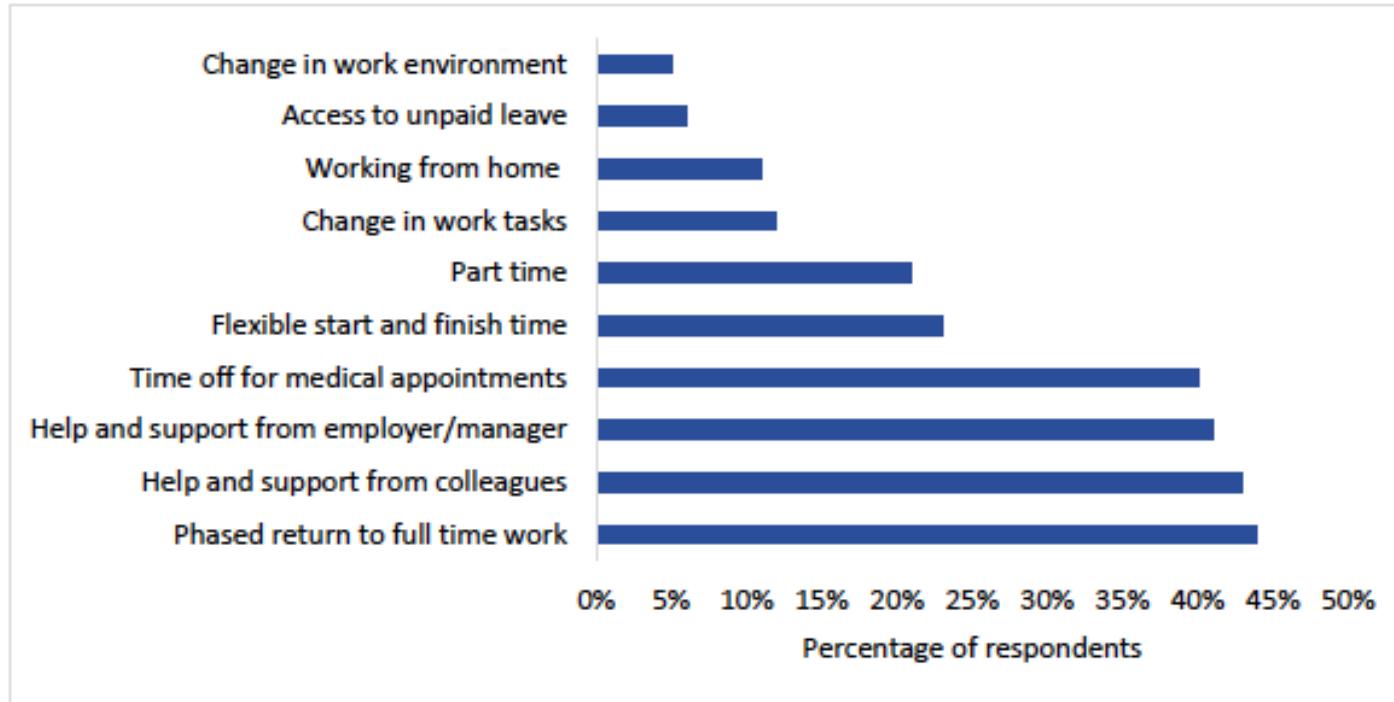
28% A sense of 'normality'

8% Work meaningful

3% Pressure from employer



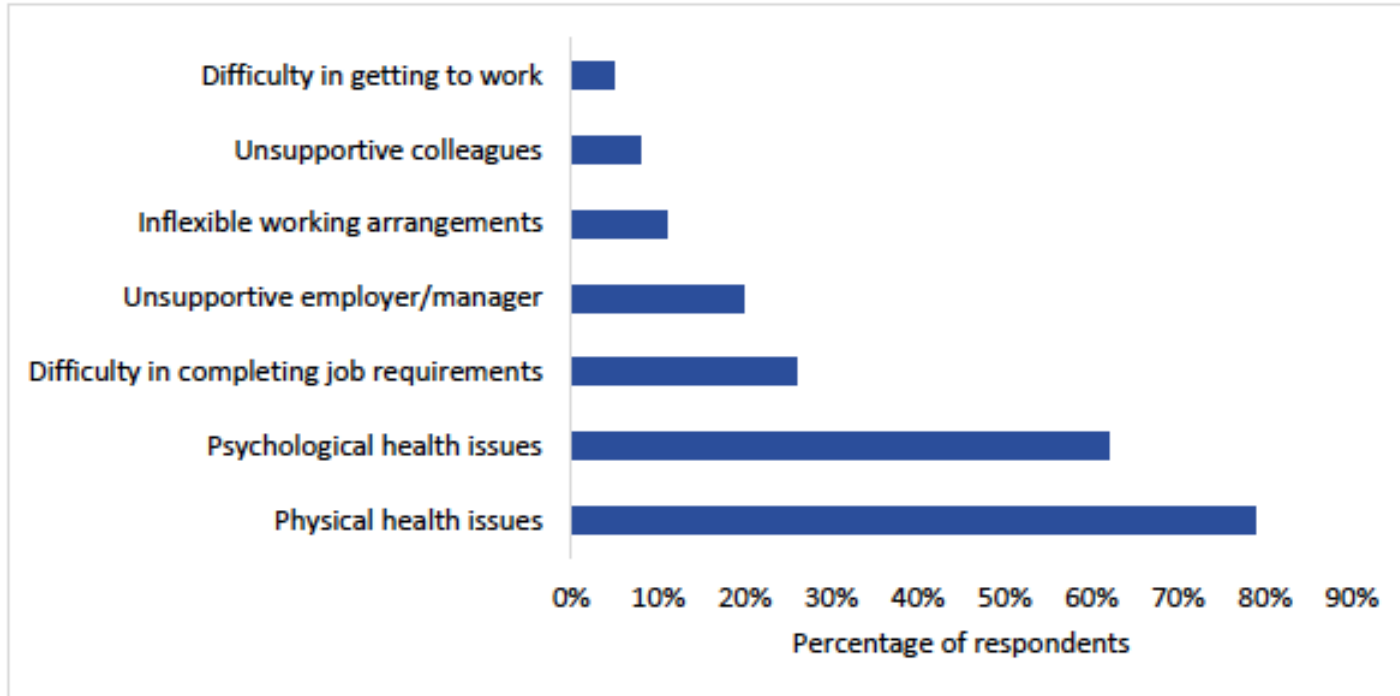
What can help a Return to Work?



Source: Authors' analysis of the 'Returning to Work' questionnaire.

Note: N = 312. The percentages are based on the weighted data.

What can challenge a Return to Work?



Source: Authors' analysis of the 'Returning to Work' questionnaire.

Note: N = 139. The percentages are based on the weighted data.

Employment Rights & Entitlements



Disability

"A substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the Irish State or to participate in social or cultural life in the Irish State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment"

- The Disability Act, 2005

Anyone living with or beyond cancer can be considered to have a disability under Irish law, even if they no longer experience any physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual restriction.



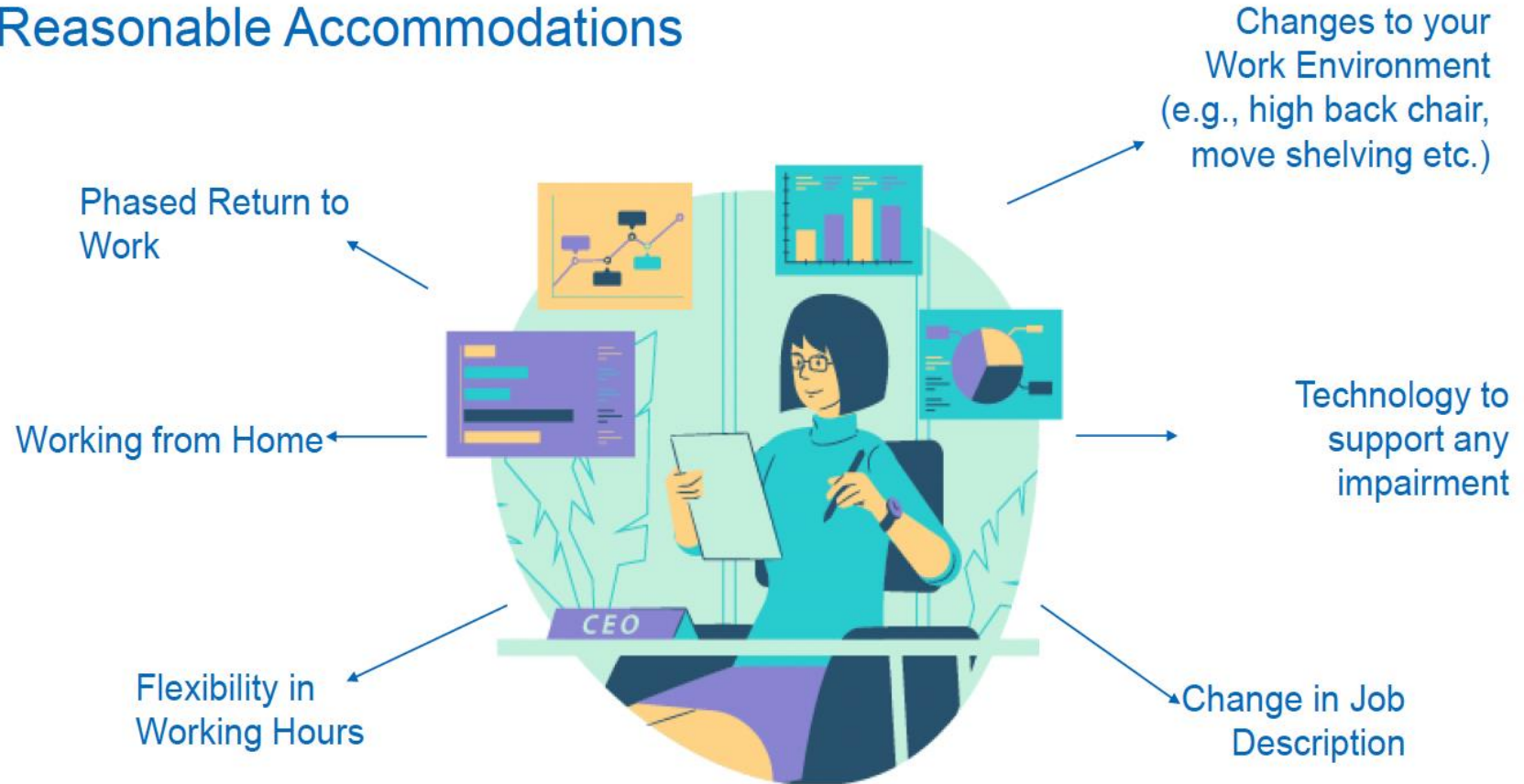
Reasonable Accommodations

‘A change or modification to the tasks and/or structure of a job or workplace, which enables employees with a disability to complete the job and enjoy equal opportunities’ (Citizen’s Information, 2021)

However, under EU law, employers are not obliged to provide special treatment or facilities if the cost of doing so is excessive or disproportionate



Reasonable Accommodations



Reasonable Accommodations

“And in terms of reasonable accommodations...I'd tend to think about someone who had an injury or in a wheelchair. I don't even know how I would consider it in terms of my situation.” (P28)



“I think some employees might think 'reasonable accommodations' and they think disability and when they think 'disability' they think visual impairment or a physical wheelchair user rather than coming back from breast cancer or anything like that.” (P29)

Workplace Equipment and Adaptation Grant (WEAG)

Private Sector: Grant called *Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant* (WEAG).

- Assistance for employers, employees and self-employed who need to adapt the workplace or purchase specialised equipment for staff with a disability. Max grant: €6,350 (*Citizen's Information, 2021*)

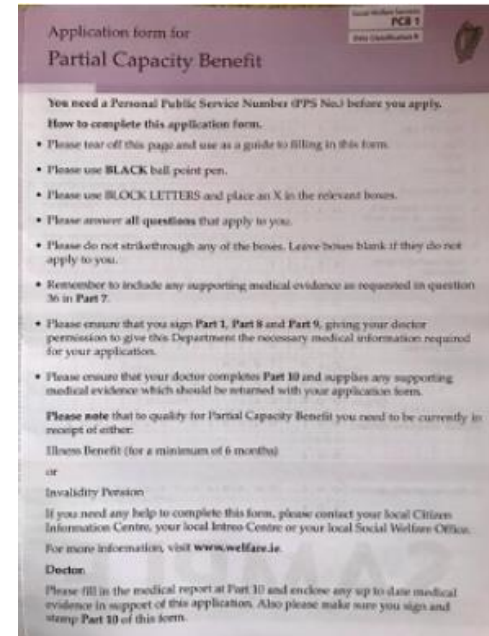
Public Sector: Employers must make assistive technology, adaptive equipment, facilities, aids and appliances available via own resources.



Partial Capacity Benefit

Social welfare scheme that allows you to return to work (if you have reduced capacity to work) and continue to receive a payment from the DSP. To receive this you need to:

- Have been claiming Illness Benefit (> six months) *or* Invalidity Pension
- Have your restriction on capacity to work assessed. It needs to fall under moderate, severe or profound. Mild does *not* qualify.
- You must receive written approval by DSP and doctor before returning to work to claim. No restrictions on earnings or hours.



The image shows a document titled "Application form for Partial Capacity Benefit". At the top right, there is a small box with the text "Social Welfare Section PCR 1" and "only classification B". Below the title, the text reads: "You need a Personal Public Service Number (PPS No.) before you apply. How to complete this application form." This is followed by a list of instructions: "Please tear off this page and use as a guide to filling in this form.", "Please use BLACK ball point pen.", "Please use BLOCK LETTERS and place an X in the relevant boxes.", "Please answer all questions that apply to you.", "Please do not strikethrough any of the boxes. Leave boxes blank if they do not apply to you.", "Remember to include any supporting medical evidence as requested in question 36 in Part 7.", "Please ensure that you sign Part 1, Part 8 and Part 9, giving your doctor permission to give this Department the necessary medical information required for your application.", "Please ensure that your doctor completes Part 10 and supplies any supporting medical evidence which should be returned with your application form." Below these instructions, a "Please note" section states: "that to qualify for Partial Capacity Benefit you need to be currently in receipt of either: Illness Benefit (for a minimum of 6 months) or Invalidity Pension". Further down, it says: "If you need any help to complete this form, please contact your local Citizens Information Centre, your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office. For more information, visit www.welfare.ie." The final section is titled "Doctor" and contains the text: "Please fill in the medical report at Part 10 and enclose any up to date medical evidence in support of this application. Also please make sure you sign and stamp Part 10 of this form."

Partial Capacity Benefit

Medical Assessment	Person previously getting Illness Benefit at the maximum personal rate €208	Person aged under 66 and previously getting Invalidity Pension at the maximum personal rate €213.50
Moderate	€104	€106.75
Severe	€156	€160.13
Profound	€208	€213.50

Correct as of September 1st 2022 (Citizen's Information, 2022)

Sick Leave – Am I entitled to it?

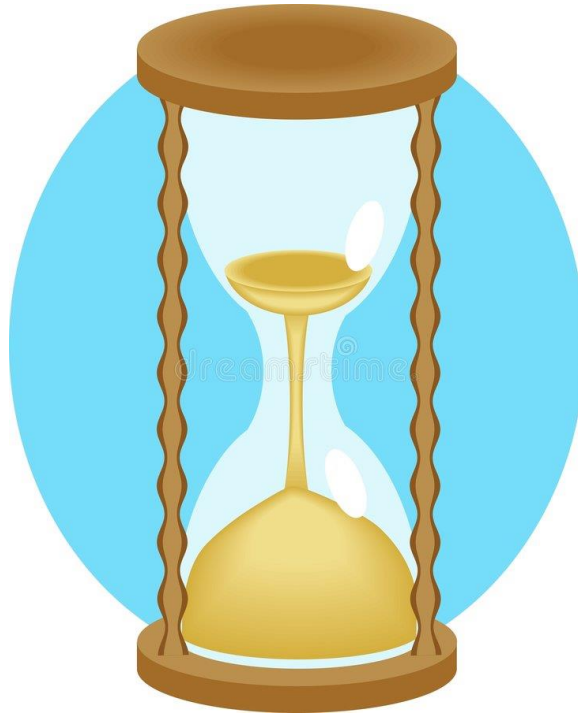


...Nearly!

Sick Leave Act (2022) became law in July 2022. Employees Sick Pay entitlement starts once the law is commenced. This requires a Ministerial Order and is expected shortly.

- Must be with your employer > 13 weeks and Need to be certified by GP
- Year 1 = 3 days. Year 2 = 5 days.
Year 3 = 7 days. Year 4 = 10 days.

Managing Cancer-Related Fatigue in Work: The 4 Ps of Energy Management

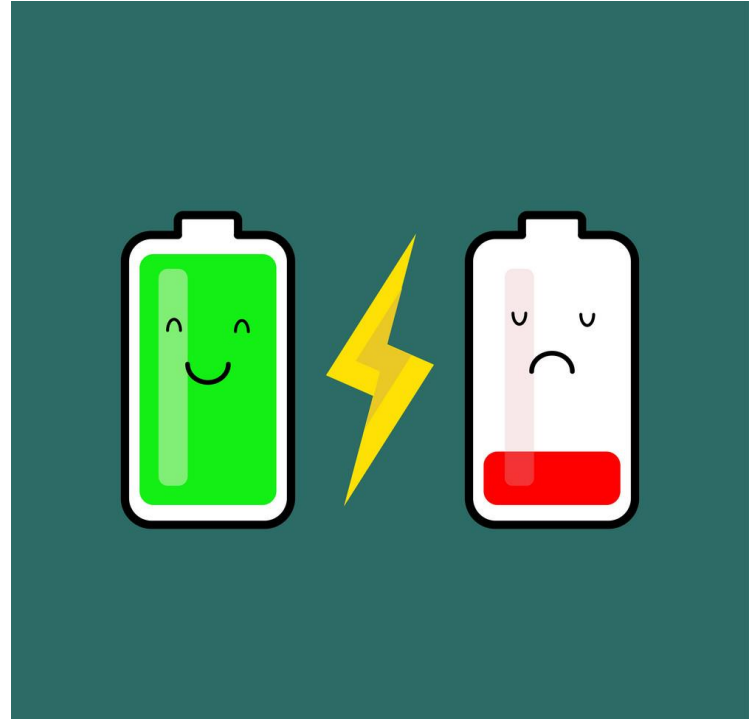


Cancer-Related Fatigue and the 4 Ps

- Different from regular fatigue
- Physical, Emotional, Cognitive Fatigue

4 Ps of Energy Conservation

- Planning
- Prioritising
- Pacing
- Posture / Position

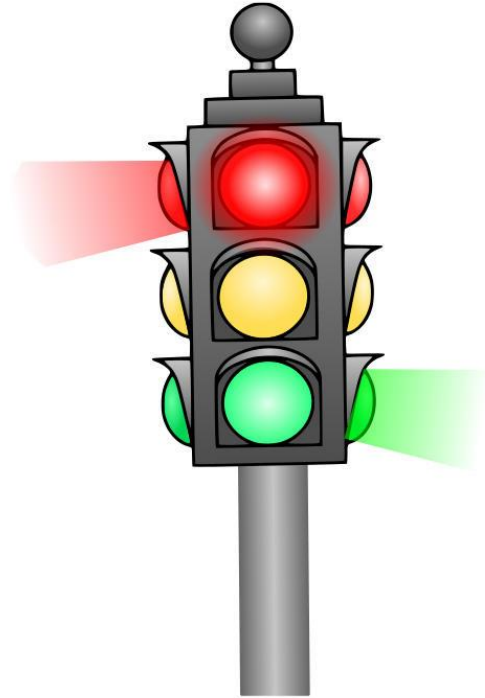


Planning using the Traffic Light System

RED: Heavy, energy-draining task e.g., presenting to colleagues, managing tills in busy retail store, attending an interactive training course

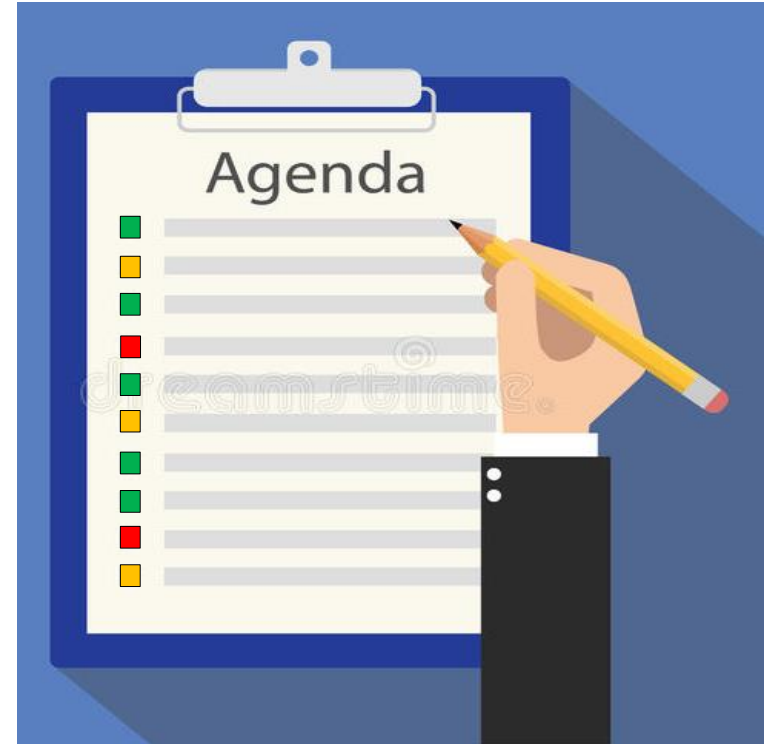
AMBER: Medium level tasks e.g., commuting, writing a short report, attending a meeting

GREEN: Low energy tasks e.g. checking emails, having a cup of tea/coffee with a trusted colleague



Planning using the Traffic Light System

- Plan heavy (**red**) and lighter (**green**) tasks
- A '**red**' day coming up at work? Plan to do very little the next day
- Have you the autonomy to plan your workday (if able)? Switch between cognitive and physical tasks



Prioritising and Pacing

Prioritising

Do I *need* to do this today? Can it be done tomorrow?

Begin with the most important task first.

Do I *have* to do this? Can I delegate?

Pacing

Add frequent rest breaks between activities

Stop before you push yourself – Don't fight fatigue

Break up larger tasks into smaller segments



Posture & Position

Did you know? You save ~25% energy by completing a task in sitting vs. standing.

- Poor posture consumes more energy -Maintain an upright and symmetrical posture.
- Support elbows and forearms on a firm surface while you work e.g. typing at a computer, making a phone-call.
- Slide, rather than lift objects.
- Avoid excessive bending , reaching, twisting and stretching



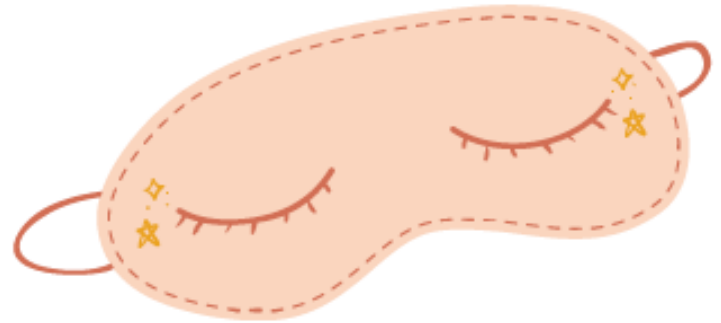
Mental Fatigue

Reflect: When you're resting, are you *really* resting?

Some ideas to switch off:

- Meditation Apps
- Guided Imagery
- Box Breathing

Noisy office? Request quieter spot if able, try noise cancelling headphones, use breaks wisely



Phased Return to Work





1. 'Review' date not decision date



2. Staircase Approach



3. Working non-consecutive days

The 3 Principles of the Phased Return

Review Date *Not* Decision Date

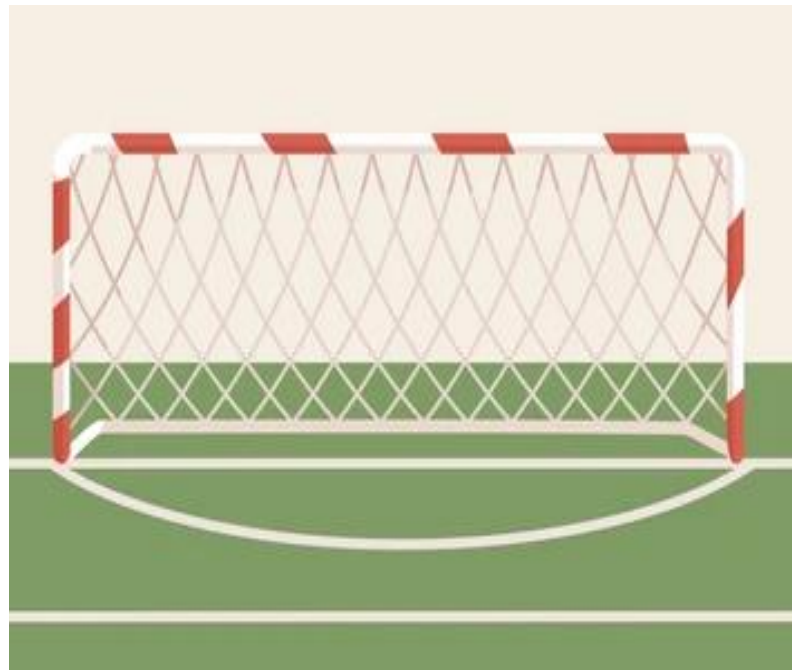
- Avoid setting formal goal-posts! This can ↑ pressure on you

Consider language. Instead of:

“I’ll be back to work in 3 months”



“I have a medical cert for another 3 months. Closer to the time, I’ll be in touch to review the situation following discussion with my medical team.”

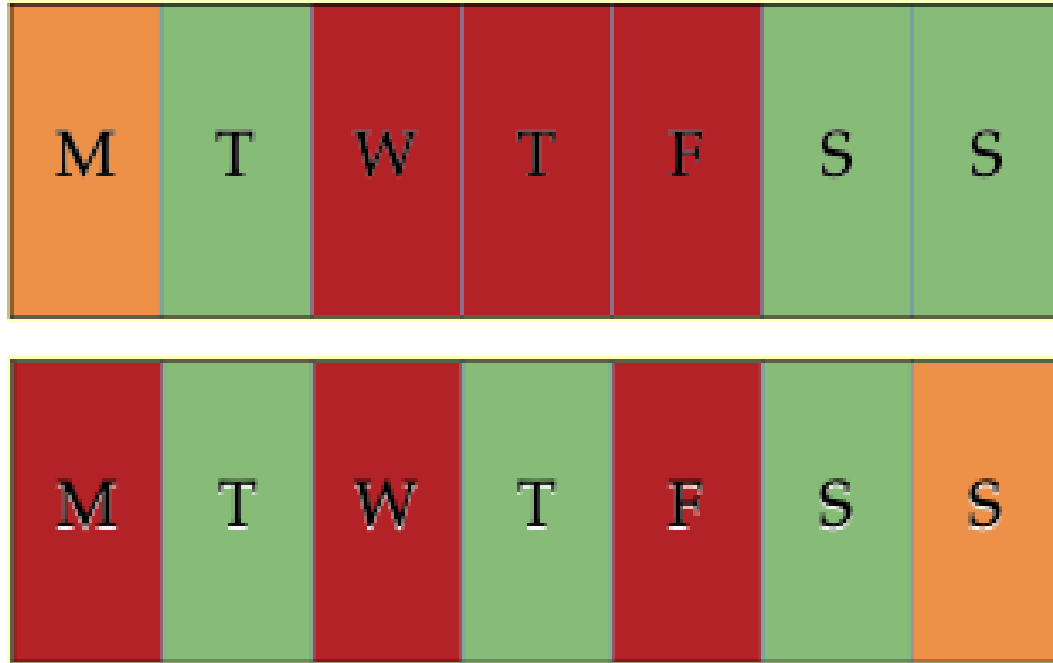


Stair Case Approach

- Phased return \neq consistent increase / incline in hours
- When you make an increase in hours.. Is it sustainable?
- If feel comfortable and not ++ fatigue, gentle increase again
- Increase does not have to be a full day
- Staircases also go down.. .it is ok if you need to take a 'step back' if hours are too much.



Consider working Non-Consecutive Days



Communicating with your Employer & Colleagues



First things first....

- It is highly recommended you keep in touch with your employer while you are out.
- **Set expectations.** Too much contact from employers can be pressurising. Agree on your terms of level of contact e.g., an email every month
- Keep a close link with close colleagues etc.
- No contact with employer and/or colleagues can ↑ anxiety



Strategies when approaching your Employer

Before the Meeting:

- Set your agenda – bullet list what you want to cover and send in an email so there are no surprises!
- Practice your conversation out loud

During:

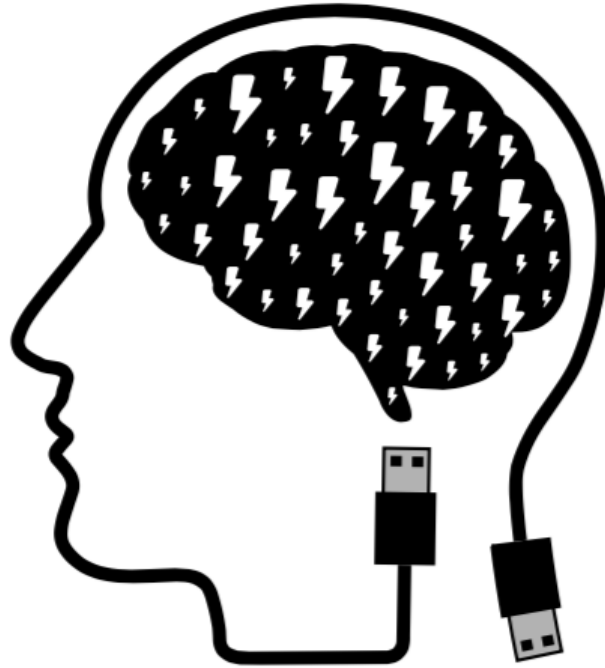
- Use leaflets to supplement your discussion (if you want)
- Take brief notes to recall what was agreed on

After:

- Send a brief meeting summary after – preferably by email (in writing!)



Managing Cognitive Changes at Work



Managing Cognitive Changes in the Workplace

- Brain fog ++ common

- Is this being further compounded by fatigue or anxiety?

Common challenges associated with work:

- Remembering colleagues' names
- Concentrating for long periods of time
- Remembering tasks to do



Strategies to recall colleagues' names

Online: Zoom meeting? Ask attendees to update names on screen.

Repetition: When you meet someone for the first time and they introduce themselves to you, repeat their name *e.g. 'Hi I'm Anne', 'Ah Anne, it's nice to meet you'.*

Association: When you learn someone's name, try to think of something/someone that you associate with that name *e.g. 'Hi, I'm John', 'Hi John, it's nice to meet you. I'll remember that now - I've two cousins called John!'*

First letter cues: A-Z

Ask: a colleague or the person themselves!



Strategies to recall work tasks

Notebook: Keep a notebook and take bullet point notes

Diary/Calendar: Keep a diary/calendar and take notes of any upcoming meetings.

Set Alarms -Some email providers e.g. Outlook offer reminders of meetings 15 minutes prior. Or use your phone.

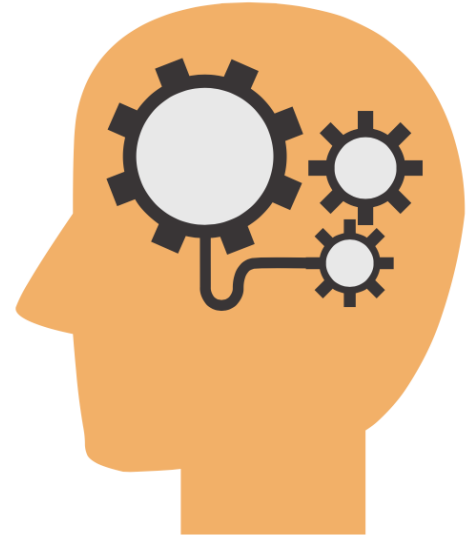
Voice Notes: Keep on hand to record quick bullet point notes.

Consistency: Where able, keeping meetings/events on at a consistent time



Strategies to enhance concentration at work

- Reduce background noise: Try noise cancelling headphones, earplugs, move to a quieter workspace if able.
- Reduce visual distractions e.g. partitions, windows
- Pomodoro technique: 25 minutes focused work, 5 minute break.
- Remember mental fatigue? If you've been spending ++ time on a cognitively heavy task, take a break.

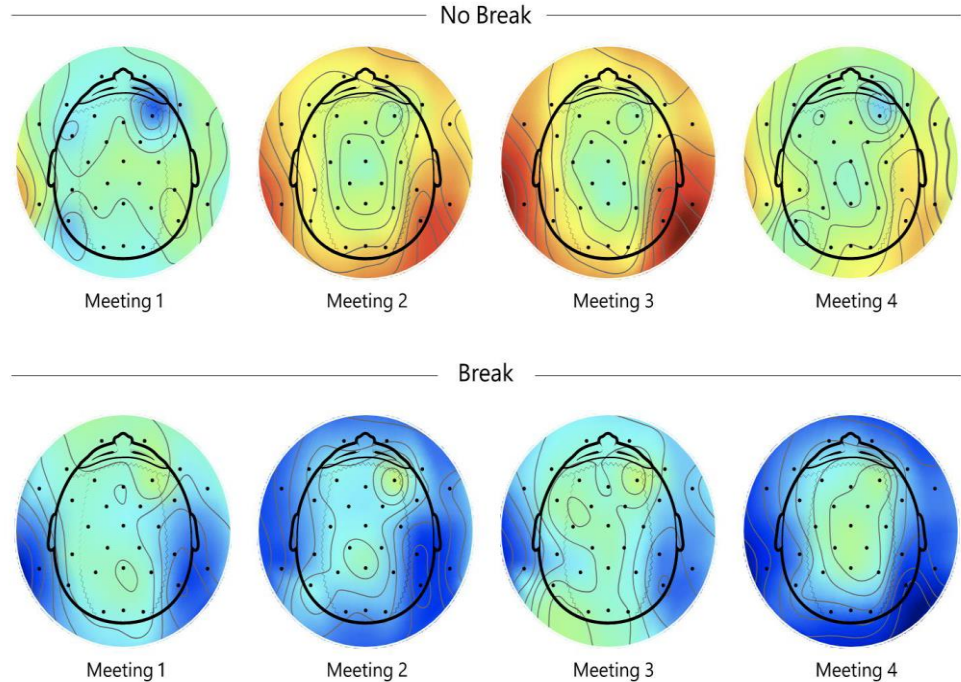


Managing Cognitive Changes at Work

Take a break from the screen

4 x 30 minute online meetings
back-to-back with **no** break

4 x 30 minute online meetings
with 10 minutes meditation in
between each



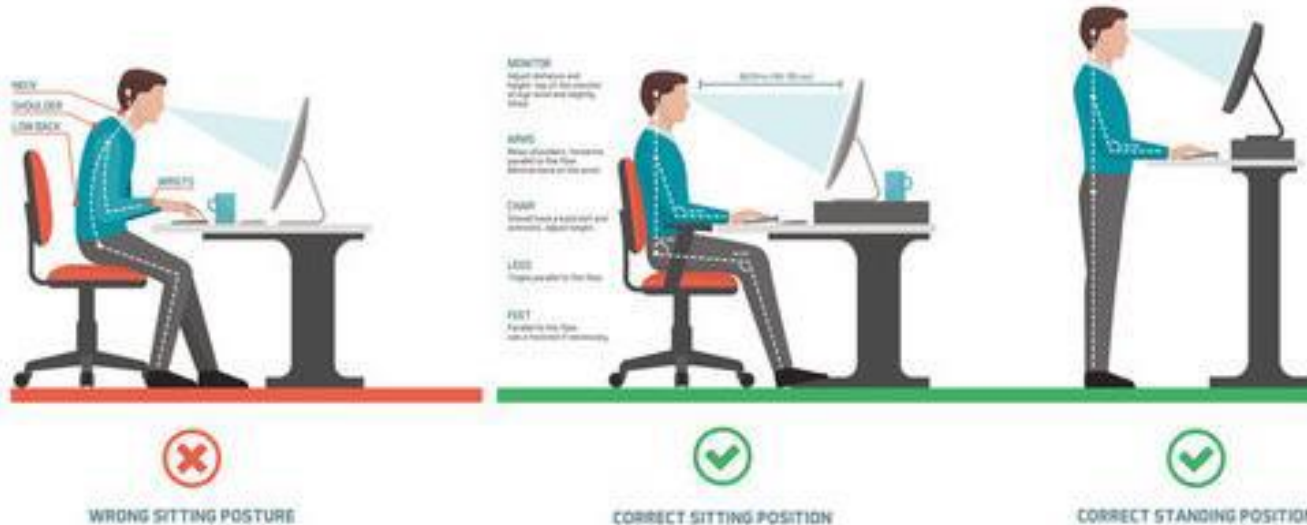
Ergonomics



Ergonomics

Ergonomics: The study of people in their working environment. Some principals of ergonomics:

(1) Work in a neutral position maintaining proper posture



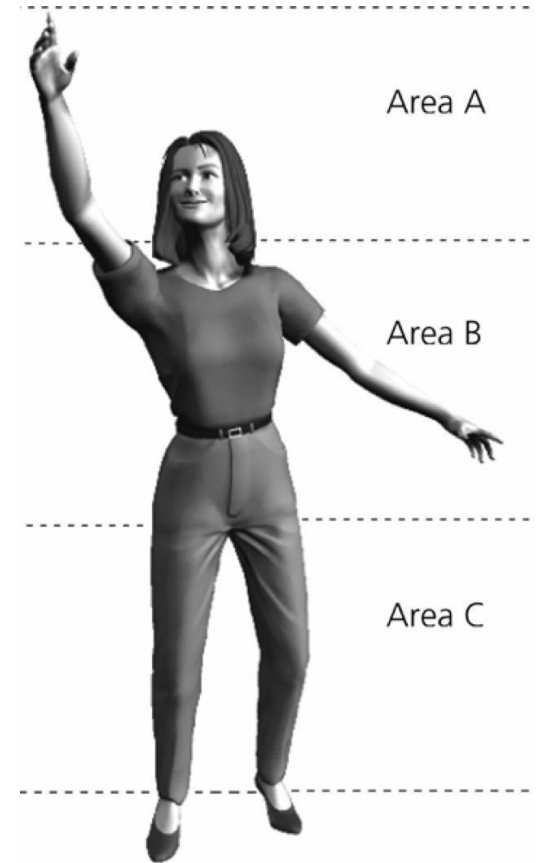
Ergonomics

(2a) Keep everything in reach: In Standing

Area A: Try to store lightweight items that are used less often in work in Area A.

Area B: Store commonly used items. If possible, store heavy objects in Area B and slide towards you when required.

Area C: If no room in Area B, store heavier objects in Area C as it is safer to lift these from this area than from up high. If particularly heavy, ask a colleague to help.

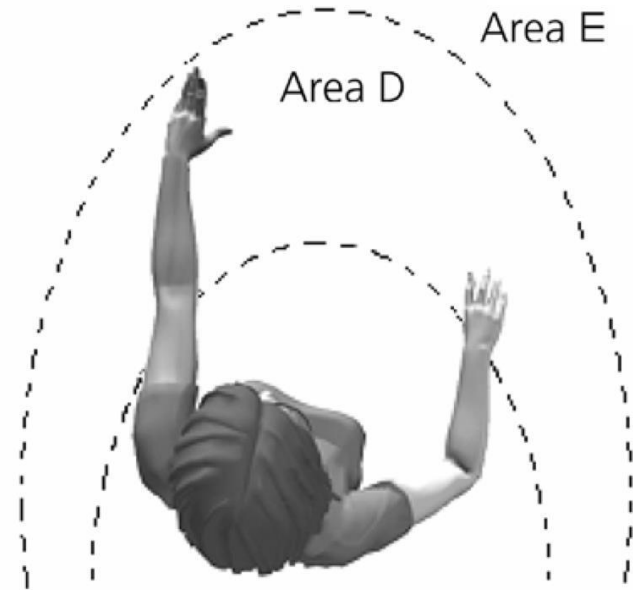


Ergonomics

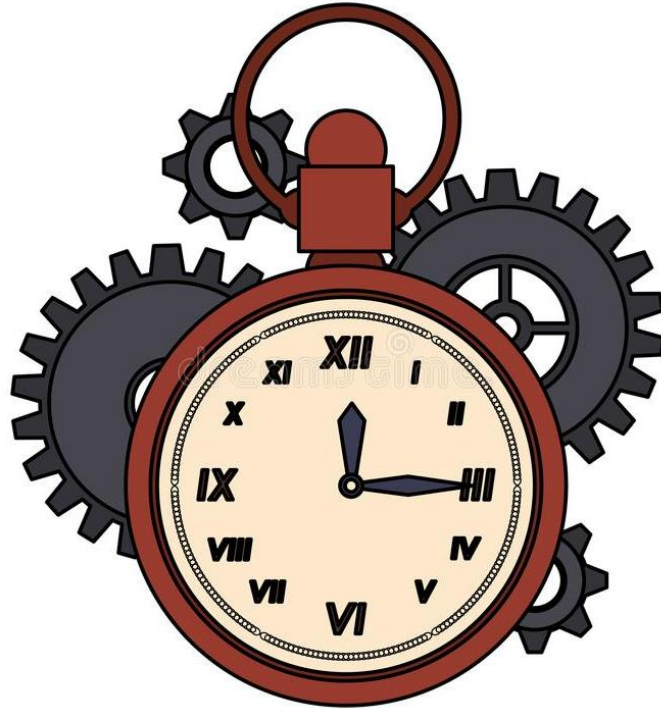
(2b) Keep everything in reach: In Sitting

Area D: Keep items that you use most frequently in work in this space.

Area E: Keep items less regularly used in this space. This reduces necessity to bend and reach.



Assessing Readiness to Work



Assessing readiness to Return to Work

Job Simulation

- Schedule a 'work day'
- Reflect on the types of tasks you do in a typical day – plan your work day based on these
- Add your commute to the day!



A Challenge: Set a Goal!

Choose ***one*** thing to do this week that will help your return to work:

Examples:

- Make a list of what you think you might struggle with at work and consider are there any reasonable accommodations that could help?
- Email your employer to touch base or text a colleague.
- Request a Partial Capacity Benefit form
- Send your employer a meeting agenda
- Book in a 'Work Day' to assess your readiness
- Try *one* strategy to reduce mental fatigue e.g. guided meditation



Thank You – Any Questions?

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