

How can I return to work successfully?

WHEN YOU have been off work due to depression, it is important to prepare for your work return. If you have been receiving care from a physician or mental health specialist, they might evaluate your fitness to return to work, based on your current functioning. If you are on long-term disability, you might be working with a rehabilitation consultant who will assist you with planning your work return. Your employer should be alerted to your return so that they can make appropriate arrangements, which may include the provision of workplace accommodations. The following suggestions will increase the likelihood of a successful and sustained return to work:

- **Actively participate in developing your return to work plan.**
Learn about company programs and policies, and identify opportunities for support at work. Use the strategies in this guide to creatively address problems, challenge unrealistic thoughts and build your level of work activity.

- **It is often helpful to cooperate with requests for information or further evaluation.**
Communication among all those concerned can be critical to ensure effective work return. When you are providing information, it is usually best to be straightforward and specific in describing your current functioning and pointing out those aspects of the job that may be challenging.
- **Be realistic, patient and flexible as you return.**
Consider what you will say to your coworkers and how you will address unresolved issues. Pace yourself – you won't likely be at your previous level of productivity immediately. Identify possible triggers or signs that you may be slipping and develop a plan to address these. Continue your self care efforts to support yourself at work.

What lifestyle changes might be helpful?

Lifestyle factors are as important for psychological well-being as they are for physical well-being. They help reduce our overall level of stress, and enhance our ability to recover from stressors and challenges. Lifestyle changes may be a focus for the skills introduced in this guide. You may want to increase activities or set goals in lifestyle areas. Some of the key lifestyle areas are: sleep; diet; use of alcohol and drugs; and exercise.

Sleep

Stress and depressed mood often disrupt sleep, and this sleep disruption can lead to further mood disruption. These are tips that can help improve your sleep:

- **Establish a regular sleep/wake cycle, including a fixed wake-up time and regular bedtime.**
Having regular hours for getting up and going to bed can help set your internal clock. If you are having problems falling asleep,

don't go to bed too early – you should not get into bed until you are sleepy. Most adults need about seven or eight hours of sleep.

- **Develop a sleep ritual.**
This may include some form of meditation or relaxation, bathing or herbal teas. Get yourself ready for the next day and then mentally “put away” any ongoing problems or upcoming tasks.
- **Don't use your bedroom for non-sleep related activities (reading or watching TV) if you are having problems with falling asleep or staying asleep.**
- **Avoid exercise, caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco in the few hours before sleep.**
- **Try not to nap during the day.**
If required, talk with your physician regarding over-the-counter sleep medications.