



Time2Work

Module 3:

Support materials for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases returning to work after rehabilitation

Adapting the workplace

Many people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs) can benefit from adaptations at work. Whether your condition was caused or exacerbated by work, or has deteriorated since you last worked, you may require some form of adaptation. This might involve adapting your workplace or the equipment you work with or your working practices, such as working flexible hours. Adaptations can be made for people with RMDs and disabilities, but first you will need to have disclosed your condition to your potential employer. (See also fact sheet, '*To disclose or not to disclose*')

Health and safety at work

All companies and organisations employing people have to work within Health and Safety Regulations. Health and safety at work are focused on enabling a sustainable work life by minimising the risk of health hazards. Other health risks involve the musculoskeletal system and here occupational therapists and ergonomists* will evaluate the relationship between jobs and environments and how these can be made compatible with the needs, abilities and limitations of workers. This might mean providing adapted equipment or make adaptations in work tasks or in the psychosocial environment. Well-designed equipment or adaptations are not just good for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases (RMDs), they are often good for everyone.

Healthy workplaces are good for you and good for the business. [NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS ADD ANY EU/NATIONAL REGULATIONS]

Employers have an obligation to adapt workplaces to enable people to work. This means fitting the work to the worker and fitting the worker to the work. [NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INSERT NATIONAL LEGISLATION]

As an employee you too have obligations to make correct use of machinery and equipment and to inform your employer of any situations that may affect your, or others', health and safety at work.

In order to determine what adaptations would be right for you, a risk assessment may be conducted by an occupational therapist or ergonomist. Various risk assessment methods exist, and different ones are available in different countries. You can find out which ones are available in your country here: [NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INSERT WEBSITE]. A risk assessment should identify what adaptations you need to be able to work.

Premises and equipment

At the European level, health and safety legislation requires employers to make certain adaptations for their staff. Some that are of relevance for people with RMDs include:

- Organising workplaces to take account of disabled workers, if necessary. This includes doors, passageways, staircases, showers, washbasins, lavatories and workstations used or occupied directly by disabled persons
- Making work equipment that is suitable available
- Ergonomic improvements in the work place

For further information see the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) website: www.osha.gov/

Financing workplace adaptations depends on national legislation [NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS INSERT NATIONAL LEGISLATION]

In reality, whilst legislation exists and can be applied to larger employers, many smaller employers may not have the capacity, capabilities or funds to make all, or any, of the necessary adaptations and accommodations to meet your needs.

Patterns of working time

Because RMDs can be unpredictable, flexible working can allow for an irregular schedule. A flexible working schedule can be a useful solution for people with RMDs and employers. Such a schedule might allow for early morning stiffness, fatigue and hospital and treatment appointments. Some companies may also be open to taking on people in a job-sharing role with other members of staff. Some types of employment may be better suited to these modes of working than others.

****Ergonomics** is the scientific discipline concerned with understanding the of interactions among humans and other elements of a system, and the profession that applies theory, principles, data and methods to design in order to optimise human well-being and overall system. (IEA, 2000)*

Supporting references

1. Desiron HA, de Rijk A, Van Hoof E, Donceel P. Occupational therapy and return to work: a systemic literature review. BMC public health. 2011;11(1):615.
2. Osthof A-KR, Niedermann K, Braun J, Adams J, Brodin N, Dagfinrud H, et al. 2018 EULAR recommendations for physical activity in people with inflammatory arthritis and osteoarthritis. Annals of the rheumatic diseases. 2018;77(9):1251-60.