

Managing absence and rehabilitation

Fit to work

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Recent government campaigns have focused on fitness to work and being supported to remain in work wherever possible.

This resource complements these initiatives and aims to provide employees and employers with the information they need to facilitate a return to work for those affected by a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD).

Keeping fit and eating correctly are both key components in helping staff fight infection and injury. Many NHS organisations offer their staff opportunities to stay or get fit through exercise classes, gyms and discount offers for schemes such as cycle to work. Access to these will depend on your trust and the funding available; usually, these types of schemes are organised by human resources, occupational health, improving working lives or health work and wellbeing officers. General fitness is not always a guarantee against injury – a simple lifting exercise wrongly executed, or just bad luck, can result in an employee sustaining an MSD.

Research has shown that without careful management, what could be a short spell of sickness absence can turn into long-term sickness and result in further medical conditions arising. For those with an MSD, a 'fast track' referral to physiotherapy or occupational health, and if necessary, a further referral to another health department, could mean an earlier return to work. Employees returning to work may need to perform lighter duties until they have made a full recovery. Research has shown the benefits of staying in work or making an early return to both the employee and the employer. If your organisation does not offer these options, it may be worthwhile discussing your situation directly with your human resources and occupational health departments as well as your line manager and staff representative.