

# RETURN-TO-WORK

Getting Started



**WORK SAFE. FOR LIFE.**

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## RETURN-TO-WORK: THE BEST OUTCOME FOR YOU, THE BEST OUTCOME FOR YOUR EMPLOYEE.

Injuries are happening. In fact, in Nova Scotia they are happening more often than they should. Preventing injuries is our best option, but if an injury occurs, the best result is a safe and timely return to work. Still injured employees in Nova Scotia take longer to return to work than in every other province or territory on Canada. Too many employees are off work for too long in our province – and some never return to work.

Work is healthy, and research proves it. When injury occurs, staying connected to the workplace and continuing to work is the most important factor in recovery. The longer employees are off work, the less likely they are to return. So when an injury does occur, the best result for everyone is a safe and timely return to work. The Workers' Compensation Board's (WCB) goal is to work with employers, employees, unions and health care providers to ensure this happens.

Employers have a key role to play. Big employers, small employers, self-employed businesses with one part-time helper – across all industries, the fact is this: return-to-work isn't just good for your employees, it's good for business. You'll reduce downtime, keep morale high, and ultimately lower the premiums you pay for workplace injury insurance.

# WORKPLACE INJURIES PUT MORE THAN 9,000 NOVA SCOTIANS OFF THE JOB EVERY YEAR

## WHY YOU NEED A RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAM

A Return-to-Work program can reduce the human impact of injury in your workplace, save you time and it can save you money. When you, your management team, injured employees, the WCB, union and health care providers all work together, an effective Return-to-Work program will:

- Allow your employee to continue working, keeping valuable skill sets and knowledge at work for you.
- Reduce or eliminate a wage loss for employees.
- Ensure communication between you and your employee, maintaining the connection to the workplace.
- Minimize lost productivity.
- Eliminate or reduce the costs of retraining new employees.
- In many cases, reduce the risk of re-injury.
- Maintain morale.
- Help reduce your WCB premiums.

An employee – let's call him Joe – is injured on the job, and he may lose time from work. A good Return-to-Work program maintains the focus to what Joe **can** do, not what he **can't** do. Here are some of the benefits:

- When Joe returns to work, things return to normal and disruption of his life is minimized.
- Joe's lost earnings are reduced or eliminated.
- Joe stays active which speeds up recovery.
- Joe keeps important social networks at the workplace which supports recovery.
- Joe's risk of being re-injured may be reduced.
- Joe maintains a sense of value, purpose and self confidence.

Document your Return-to-Work program and ensure everyone understands what to do if an injury occurs. And remember, your program can be scaled to the size and complexity of your organization.

# STEP 1

## SELECT A RETURN-TO-WORK COORDINATOR OR CREATE A COMMITTEE

First things first – you’ll need to attach a name and a face to return-to-work in your workplace. The coordinator guides the day-to-day function of your Return-to-Work program.

Depending on the size of your workforce, you may have a safety representative. The Return-to-Work coordinator will work closely with the safety representative. Be sure to choose individuals who will work well together. Both should have a balanced understanding of employer and employee points of view. Experience or knowledge of processes across your workplace is also valuable.

In larger workplaces, the coordinator should spearhead the creation of a committee to help develop the Return-to-Work program. In some cases, you could ask the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHS) to take on this responsibility. You should also try to have representatives from all aspects of your operation on your committee. If your workplace is unionized, it is important committee members reflect the viewpoints of both labour and management.

### ABOUT COMMITTEES

If you have 20 or more employees regularly employed at a workplace, you’re required to have a JOHS committee. If you like, this committee may also coordinate your Return-to-Work program. Your Return-to-Work committee may also be a sub-committee of the JOHS committee. It may involve some members or not all, or it may be completely separate. It’s up to you. It’s all about what works for you and your employees.

### WHAT MAKES A GOOD RETURN-TO-WORK COMMITTEE MEMBER?

- An understanding of the challenges injured employees face in returning to work.
- An awareness of the human and financial costs associated with workplace injuries.
- An understanding of the role work can play in injury recovery.
- Knowledge of occupational health and safety, human resources and employee benefits is ideal.
- Open to creative approaches in addressing return-to-work issues and challenges.

### EXAMPLE: RETURN-TO-WORK COORDINATOR

Joanna is ABC Manufacturing’s Return-to-Work coordinator. She helped develop the program. Joanna is part of ABC’s JOHS committee – which also handles return-to-work issues for ABC and their 350 employees. One day, Travis is seriously injured at work. After Travis receives first aid, and while JOHS committee members investigate the injury, Joanna talks to Travis and helps him get the immediate care he needs. She contacts the WCB to file an Accident Report Form. She keeps in touch with Travis regularly to see how he’s doing. Meanwhile, she works with the WCB case worker, Travis and his health care providers to develop a plan for transitional duties so Travis can come back to a job that he can perform safely while he recovers from the injury. Once back to the workplace, Joanna and the WCB case worker support Travis’s recovery and continue to enhance his job duties until he is fully able to perform his pre-injury job. By returning to work, the human and financial impact of the injury on both Travis and ABC is reduced.

# INJURED EMPLOYEES STAY OFF THE JOB LONGER IN NOVA SCOTIA THAN IN ANY OTHER PROVINCE

One of the first tasks of the coordinator or committee will be to advise you regarding a Return-to-Work policy.

A Return-to-Work policy is your guide to creating a spirit of health and productivity in your workplace. It clearly outlines the commitment of management, unions or employee representatives, and employees themselves.

The goal of the program is safe and timely return-to-work. All policies, procedures, roles, responsibilities and communications must support and reinforce this goal. The policy is the anchor for return-to-work in your organization.

## LEAD BY EXAMPLE

It's critical you show leadership in your Return-to-Work policy. It must not be simply a poster on a wall or a piece of paper in a filing cabinet – it must be a philosophy lived and breathed across your organization. From the CEO to the entry-level employee, strive to foster a work environment based on the fundamental belief that work is healthy and helps recovery.

Ensure the policy is clearly worded and easy to understand.

The policy should outline the values and philosophy of the program and include agreed upon terms of reference. It should also include the expectations of both management and employees if an injury occurs.

Your policy should be signed by a senior leader, underlining the organization's commitment to helping employees return to meaningful, healthy and safe work. In addition, you might want to have employees sign the policy during their orientation, to ensure they are aware of their return-to-work rights and responsibilities.

For examples of Return-to-Work policies, visit <http://www.wcb.ns.ca/return-to-work/>

# STEP 3

## PERFORM A JOB TASK ANALYSIS

As part of your safety program, it is helpful to have a detailed task or process analysis of all jobs in your operation. This is valuable information to assess potential injury risks or hazards before they become an issue.

A similar process can be used to develop a job task analysis – an incredibly valuable tool in your Return-to-Work program that takes a detailed look at the work tasks each job involves.

This can help you determine the duties that can be assigned to an injured employee based on their functional abilities. Remember – work is healthy, and it’s all about what an employee **can** do – not what they **can’t** do.

Job task analyses varies from one organization to the next. Find the one that works for you.

### A GOOD JOB TASK ANALYSIS INCLUDES:

- Detailed descriptions of each job and tasks involved including the tools, machines, and equipment used, postures required, and the height and weight of objects lifted or moved.
- Endurance factors such as strength required for lifting, how long one has to walk, stand, sit, and the physical demands placed on the shoulders, back, arms and legs.

### EXAMPLE JOB TASK ANALYSIS

Position description:	Baker
Job task analyzed:	Baking donuts and other foods
Machines involved:	Ovens, kitchen utensils, knives, mixers, conveyors
Objects lifted or moved:	Mix packages, 8 kg, storage (knees) to mixer (waist) height
Frequent motion:	Bending to low oven
Strain, work demand:	MEDIUM work (lifting 8kg bags frequently)

NOTE: From a prevention point of view, the job task analysis identifies hazards and potential injuries and suggests controls to mitigate them. Every step of the process is broken down – for example, removing the pan from the oven involves a risk due to heat, which is controlled with heat-resistant gloves. This information can be developed at the same time as the job task analysis above. Your local physiotherapist is a great resource in helping you analyze jobs and write descriptions. See your Preventing Workplace Injuries (PWI) resource manual on the prevention section of [www.wcb.ns.ca](http://www.wcb.ns.ca) for more information.

## STRAINS AND SPRAINS ACCOUNT FOR

60%

OF ALL TIME-LOSS INJURIES IN NOVA SCOTIA

When an injury occurs, the goal for both the employer and the employee is to help get things back to the way they were before the injury. This is where defining transitional duties comes in.

Transitional duties must be meaningful, productive and within the injured employee's skills and abilities. When an employee returns to transitional duties, work together to progressively increase duties as their function improves.

**Transitional Duties:**

Any temporary change to the employee's job tasks that align with the employee's functional abilities – what the employee can do.

General questions of wages and salary around transitional duties, should also be addressed and documented when planning your Return-to-Work program – not decided on a case-by-case basis. Although, it is important to be flexible and have the ability to tailor decisions as appropriate.

Transitional duties should be as closely related to the original job as possible given the employee's restrictions. The transitional assignment should be short-term. A date to return to regular duties should be clearly determined at the outset based on when the employee is physically able to return to the original pre-injury job.

Effective and efficient assessment of injuries and assignment of transitional duties will minimize work time lost.

**EXAMPLE: TRANSITIONAL DUTIES**

Tyler works in a warehouse and strains his back. Depending on various factors, there are numerous options for transitional duties.

- **Pre-injury job with modifications of some duties;**

Example: Tyler returns to his same job, but now moves boxes with a cart, instead of by hand.

- **Pre-injury job with elimination of some duties;**

Example: Tyler returns to his job, but no longer moves heavier boxes.

- **Some pre-injury duties with some new duties;**

Example: In addition to moving lighter boxes, Tyler helps with inventory and tracking shipments.

- **New duties;**

Example: Unfortunately, Tyler, is temporarily unable to return to his pre-existing job.

He now helps with accounting and costing in the office until he can return to the warehouse.

# STEP 5

## PROMOTE YOUR RETURN-TO-WORK PROGRAM

You've appointed a Return-to-Work coordinator, you've chosen a committee, and you have a policy in place. All job functions in your organization have been evaluated, and you've done some thinking about transitional duties for injured employees.

Now it's time to promote the return-to-work message across your organization.

Face-to-face meetings are the best way to deliver information about new programs. When it's logistically feasible, hold staff meetings and outline the approach to return-to-work in person and ensure responsibilities are understood. This sends a strong message of commitment.

Coupled with your prevention message, make return-to-work part of every orientation. An information package will help to lessen the concerns about what happens if an injury occurs and reassures new employees you will be there for them.

Take every opportunity to promote the importance of return-to-work, and your company's commitment to the new policy. Mention it informally whenever possible and ensure your policy is posted prominently. Ensure your actions support the goal of safe and timely return-to-work.

As you promote return-to-work, keep a few themes in mind:

- Show the human and financial impact of workplace injury.
- Outline the responsibilities of return-to-work partners (employee, health care provider, employer and WCB).
- Promote the benefits of return-to-work for both you and your employees.

It's also very important to share consistent messages with staff, managers, supervisors, executive team, union executive, and your Board of Directors.

### SPREAD THE NEWS: RETURN-TO-WORK INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Here are a few ideas to let employees know return-to-work is key to what you do:

- Mention the program at key staff meetings.
- Promote the program in employee newsletters.
- Send a memo or an email to all employees.
- Post your policy in common areas.
- Dedicate a section of your employee Intranet to return-to-work success stories (always consider confidentiality).

# NOVA SCOTIA HAS THE HIGHEST RATE OF SELF-REPORTED DISABILITY IN CANADA

# MANAGING RETURN-TO-WORK WHEN AN INJURY OCCURS: STEPS TO FOLLOW

Despite your best intentions, an injury has occurred in your workplace. You've provided first aid, and medical attention if needed. Your investigation of the incident is underway to discover how it happened and ensure it doesn't happen again. This section outlines what happens next.

## MONITOR YOUR CLAIMS COSTS

**Advice Notices:** If you would like a report of your injury costs you may request a monthly advice notice by calling our Assessment Department at 1-877-211-9267.

**MyAccount:** You can now access your WCB account online. When it's fully functional, our online access will also allow you to track claims costs on your account. Be sure to register for MyAccount at [www.my-account.ns.ca](http://www.my-account.ns.ca), and check back often throughout the return-to-work process.

The return-to-work process starts immediately following an injury:

**1 Report the injury** – If the employee needs medical attention, or will lose time from work, complete an Accident Report (Form 67) and submit it to the WCB on the day of the injury – penalties may apply to reports filed more than five days after the injury. A WCB case worker is assigned to the claim when we receive the report. Forms are available on our website at [www.wcb.ns.ca](http://www.wcb.ns.ca)

**Fax the form to 902.491.8001** or submit via MyAccount once this function is available.

**2 Maintain contact with the employee** – Let the employee know you are concerned for their health and wellness. Reassure them you will help them get back to work as soon as is safely possible.

**3 Provide health care** – The type of health care required depends on the type of injury. If the employee is expected to lose time from work as a result of a strain or sprain, refer the employee to a WCB approved health care provider for an immediate assessment. This includes a physiotherapist, chiropractor or other health care provider trained in functional assessment – be sure to contact the WCB or visit [www.wcb.ns.ca](http://www.wcb.ns.ca) for a list of approved providers. For more serious injuries, or when in doubt, ensure the employee sees a physician, and work with your WCB case worker to determine next steps.

## STRAINS AND SPRAINS

Many injuries are soft-tissue sprains and strains. In these cases, there are two additional steps to follow:

**3(a) Complete the PT Intake Report (Form A)** – Fill out the **worker** and **employer** sections of the report, attach a copy of the employee's current functional job demands and available transitional duties, and give it to the employee. Direct the employee to an approved health care provider for a functional assessment. The employee will give the report to the approved health care provider, who will complete the form after conducting the assessment and send a copy to you and the WCB.

**3(b) Compare the employee's functional abilities with transitional duties** – Remember to focus on what the employee can do, not what they can't do. Following the initial assessment, the approved health care provider will provide details on the employee's injury, diagnosis, and if required, a treatment plan. The employee's functional abilities and capacity for returning to work will be determined during the assessment. **If the employee's current functional abilities match the demands of the pre-injury duties or transitional duties, the employee can return to work immediately.**

If the employee is unable to return to full pre-injury duties, the approved health care provider will provide a Physical Abilities Report. The report is updated every two weeks to show the progress the employee is making toward recovery.

**4 Develop a Return-to-Work plan** – After the WCB receives the Physical Abilities Report from the health care provider, your WCB case worker will contact you, the employee and the health care providers to collaborate on a plan. To develop the employee's individual return-to-work plan, we establish a team including your Return-to-Work coordinator, the injured employee, the injured employee's supervisor and health care provider, a union representative (if workplace is unionized), and your WCB case worker to achieve a safe and timely return to the job.

**5 Provide transitional duties** – If the employee returns to transitional duties, we will continue to work together to progressively increase the duties as the employee's function improves. The objective is to return the employee to full, pre-injury job duties.

**6 Support your employee** – You can support your employee throughout the return-to-work process by:

- Reassuring your employee you are concerned with their health and wellness.
- Helping to maintain your employee's dignity.
- Maintaining communication with your employee, WCB case worker and health care providers.
- Providing meaningful work, and monitoring it.
- Accommodating your employee's scheduled health care appointments.
- Ensuring the job duties are increased as your employee's abilities increase.
- Focusing on the objective of returning your employee to full pre-injury duties.
- Maintaining your employee's connection to the pre-injury job.

In the unlikely event your employee does not recover to their pre-injury condition, and is unable to perform the duties of their pre-injury job, you will need to find an alternate but suitable job. Your WCB case manager and vocational rehabilitation counselor will assist with permanent job changes.

**If you have concerns at any time, contact your WCB case worker.**

### **CASE CONFERENCES: WORKING THROUGH CHALLENGES, TOGETHER**

If your employee has not returned to work as planned, your WCB case worker will schedule a case conference. You, your employee and health care providers will discuss the situation to find solutions to the barriers they face and agree on a go-forward plan. Open and ongoing communication and team work are essential to return-to-work success.

## **GET STARTED TODAY**

**C**reating a Return-to-Work program in your company doesn't need to be complicated. But it does take commitment from you and your employees to do things right. By taking the steps outlined in this booklet, you can help your employees return to work in a safe and timely manner.

If you have additional questions or want more information about workplace safety or return-to-work, please contact us.

At any step along the way we are here to help.

**View complete return-to-work information at:**  
[www.wcb.ns.ca/return-to-work](http://www.wcb.ns.ca/return-to-work)



[www.wcb.ns.ca](http://www.wcb.ns.ca)  
[info@wcb.gov.ns.ca](mailto:info@wcb.gov.ns.ca)  
Injury Reporting Fax: 902.491.8001

Online account access for employers:  
[www.my-account.ns.ca](http://www.my-account.ns.ca)

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