

# UNDERSTANDING TRANSITIONAL WORK FOR PEOPLE INJURED AT WORK

**WORK SAFE.  
FOR LIFE.**

WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD OF NOVA SCOTIA

**WORKING  
TO WELL** 

## Introduction

If you are injured on the job, WCB Nova Scotia is here to help you recover from your injury. This means working with you, your employer, and your health care provider to get the treatment you need, helping to connect you with work you can do safely while recovering, and providing financial support if you need to miss time from work.

## Transitional work

Connecting you with meaningful work that you can do safely while recovering is where transitional work comes in. Similar to when you are injured outside of work, often making small changes to your job can help you recover safely at work. This could mean you don't have to miss work and minimizes the financial impact of being off work because of your injury.

## What is transitional work?

Transitional work is the type of work you can safely perform while recovering. This might entail modified or alternative tasks, but it should be meaningful, productive, and within your present skills and capabilities.

Transitional work is temporary and keeps you active and at the center of safe and timely return-to-work progress.

As you progress in your recovery, restrictions and limitations change. This will prompt changes in what you can do safely and changes to the types of transitional work you may be doing.

**Modified transitional work** is doing the parts of your existing job that can be done safely by working with your employer to provide supports, changes, or tools to help. Sometimes making safe, small changes to your job right away can help you stay at work and safely recover.

For example:

### If your pre-injury job required

- Heavy lifting
- Standing for long periods
- Full-time hours

### Your modified job may include

- A cap on how much you lift
- A chair so you can rest
- Reduced hours

**Alternative transitional work** is a whole new set of tasks, maybe even in a different department.

For example:

### If your pre-injury job required

- Driving a truck
- Working on a factory floor
- Tending to injuries at the scene of a collision

### Your alternate job may include

- Working in dispatch
- Training new staff
- Updating safety manuals

### Transitional duties should be:

- Temporary – your transitional work will change to match your abilities as your recovery progresses.
- Meaningful – this is real work the employer needs done. You are contributing to the organization through this work.



## Functional abilities - skills for daily living

Functional abilities allow us to live our day-to-day lives - at home, work and play. Whether you are playing with your kids, getting on and off a bus, or at work writing reports, all of these tasks take functional abilities.

For example, if your job requires you to be able to lift 20 kg packages to waist level, lifting that much weight would be one of your functional abilities. If your job requires you to be present at fires, traffic collisions, or other traumatic events, staying calm under pressure is one of your functional abilities.

## Why is staying connected to work important?

- Work gives you a sense of purpose and self-worth. That's good for your mental health.
- Being at work keeps you in touch with work friends and other co-workers. That's good for your social health.
- Going to work and performing your job keeps you moving. That's good for your physical health.
- Staying connected with the workplace keeps you in the loop and minimizes the financial impact of being off work due to injury. That's good for your financial health.
- Having a stable routine gets you back to feeling "normal." And that's good for you and your family.

Nobody will rush you back to work before it's safe for you to do so. Transitional work focuses on what you can do safely based on your current abilities, which will evolve as you recover. It's determined as part of your return-to-work plan, which is created by you, your employer, your health care provider(s) and WCB case worker.



## After the injury – what work can you do safely while recovering

If you are injured at work, your employer will work with you to identify transitional work that you can do safely based on your current limitations and abilities.

In some cases, similar to when you are injured outside of work, your employer can safely make modifications right away to enable you to continue working safely while you recover. In these instances, a functional assessment is not needed to determine your abilities.

After your injury, you might also need to visit a health care provider who will assess your injury and create a treatment plan to help you recover. Health care providers also assess how the injury impacts your functional abilities, and note any restrictions and limitations, to help you and your employer continue to understand what you can do safely.

For instance, a physical injury could affect your range of motion, or a diagnosis of PTSD might have a broader impact on various functional and cognitive abilities.

## A safe and timely return to work

The whole point of your return-to-work plan is to help you recover from your injury and enjoy the benefits of a safe and timely return to the workplace.

- Safe means finding tasks that focus on what you can do, not what you can't, so your recovery will be successful.
- Timely means returning as soon as you're able without doing too much too soon. Research shows lengthy absences from the workplace can have negative effects on a person's health and wellbeing.

Your return-to-work plan will help you improve your abilities and get you back to how you were functioning before you were injured.

## What works for you?

Think about the work you currently do, the work you can do right now, the guidance you received from your health care provider, and the work you will be able to do as your recovery progresses. Start with the job tasks you did before your injury and list any ideas here – and be sure to share them with your employer and health care providers.

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