

EARLY/MODIFIED RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM

1.0 OVERVIEW:

The implementation of an Early/Modified Return to Work Program can effectively control otherwise difficult claims and claim costs. Direct savings can immediately be achieved in medical, temporary and permanent disability, vocational rehabilitation and even legal expenses. Indirect savings may also be realized in insurance premiums, lost business, customer satisfaction, replacement costs, and morale.

2.0 WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT EARLY/MODIFIED RETURN TO WORK:

EMPLOYEE PAY: Workers' Compensation benefits are generally designed to replace two-thirds (67%) of the employee's lost wages up to a maximum prescribed by law. Therefore, you do not have to pay the employee at the same amount. It is recommended that if an injured worker returns back to work; pay should be modified in some way to provide an incentive to the employee to return to work without restriction.

DURATION OF MODIFIED WORK: Although it will depend on the type of injury and your company, it is recommended that a 2-4 month time period be the maximum time the employee is allowed to work in a modified capacity. In most cases, this is sufficient time for the physician to determine permanent work status.

EMPLOYEE REFUSAL TO RETURN TO WORK: If the treating physician has assigned work restrictions based on medical findings, and the employee will not accept modified work, the employee will lose temporary disability benefits. Company policies should outline requirements for employee attendance.

PART-TIME MODIFIED WORK: Modified positions do not have to be full-time. If the physician assigns restrictions that only allow for part-time work, it is recommended that the employee be placed in a part-time assignment.

NO MODIFIED WORK AVAILABLE: Modified work is an important tool in controlling claim costs. However, it is possible that not all work restrictions can be accommodated. It is important as a management tool to fully document instances where accommodations cannot be reached and determine possible future alternatives.

UNIONS AND MODIFIED WORK: Although union agreements can be a barrier to early//modified return to work, many unionized companies have been successful with early//modified return by communicating and negotiating with union representatives.

3.0 THE STEPS TO AN EARLY/MODIFIED RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM:

Step 1: Establish Relationship with Treating Physician or Clinic

Contact your medical provider and invite your treating physician to tour your worksite and become familiar with the physical requirements of different positions in your company. Ask that you be kept informed on the status of all workplace injuries.

Step 2: Provide the Physician with a Work Status/Restriction Form

The physician must clearly communicate physical restrictions to you to enable you to assign modified work to the injury employee. Although many physicians and clinics use work status forms, many are not adequate in outlining work restrictions. The form in this manual will provide physicians with a standard that clearly outlines injured workers' restrictions.

Step 3: Determine Tasks that the Injured Worker can Perform

Identifying tasks that can be performed by any worker before an injury occurs simplifies the process for everyone involved. By planning ahead, the manager and department will be prepared to assign an injured worker to a job or task.

Step 4: Complete Job Requirement Checklist

The Job Requirement Checklist in this manual can be used to describe the physical requirements of each job to the physician. When the physician understands the demands of the employee's regular or modified position, he/she will be more likely to agree with a modified position.

Step 5: Establish Early/Modified Return to Work Policies and Procedures

Once you have completed the above steps, it is recommended that you establish procedures for your Early/Modified Return to Work Program:

1. A time limit of 2 to 4 months is recommended. This will encourage more aggressive treatment and reduce the possibility of long-term unnoticed modified work assignments.
2. If you experience a high frequency of injuries, it is suggested that you limit the number of modified work assignments available by department.
3. A policy statement should be written. Top management should support the program and all levels of employees should be informed. A sample policy statement is included.

EARLY / MODIFIED RETURN TO WORK (SAMPLE POLICY STATEMENT)

In an effort to minimize disability due to industrial injuries, and to reduce the costs of workers' compensation, _____ (insert company name) _____ has developed an Early/Modified Return to Work Program. The Program is a team effort and commitment made by all levels of management, including supervisors and employees.

_____ (Insert company name) _____ offers a Return to Work Program for employees who have been injured on the job. Transitional work will be provided whenever possible for _____ (insert amount of time) _____ while the employee is recovering and unable to return to her or his regular duties. It is our goal to provide meaningful work assignments as soon as feasible following an injury, while avoiding any aggravation of the injury.

Cc: Employee Handbook

Workers' Compensations Insurance Carrier

Medical Providers

EARLY / MODIFIED RETURN TO WORK JOB REQUIREMENT CHECKLIST

Employee/Patient Name: _____

Job Title, Department: _____

Company Name: _____

Regular Job

Temporary Modified Job

Activity	Frequency		Number of Hours									
	Continuous	Intermittent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	+
Sitting												
Walking												
Standing												
Bending												
Squatting												
Climbing												
Kneeling												
Twisting												
Stretching												

Activity Requirements			Frequency
HAND	Left	Right	
• Hand Coordination			
• Simple Grasping			
• Pushing and Pulling			
• Fine Hand Coordination			
ABILITY TO REACH			
• Reach above the shoulder			
• Reach at or below shoulder level			
FEET	YES	NO	
• Operate foot controls			
• Repetitive movement			
• Hand Coordination			
AUDIO / VISUAL			
• Special visual or auditory requirements?			
WEIGHT	Lifting	Carrying	
• 10 lbs. or less			
• 11 lbs. to 25 lbs.			
• 26 lbs. to 50 lbs.			
• 51 lbs. to 75 lbs.			
• 76 lbs. to 100 lbs.			
• Over 100 lbs.			
• Longest Distance Carried			
• Heaviest item carried and how far?			

**EARLY / MODIFIED RETURN TO WORK
MODIFIED TASK IDENTIFICATION**

Examples of restrictions and tasks below. Use the attached blank form.

DEPARTMENT: _____

RESTRICTIONS	TASKS THAT CAN BE PERFORMED
No Lifting or Carrying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entering information into computer • Answering telephones • Filing
No Pushing or Pulling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completes paperwork • Filing • Answering telephones • Light sorting
No Standing or Walking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sorting mail • Answering customer service phones
No Stooping, Bending, Squatting or Kneeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sits on stool and works
No Overhead Lifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifting, sorting at waist level • Counter level assembly/testing
No Use of Dominant Arm or Head	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answering telephone with non-dominant arm/hand • Cashiering
No Prolonged Sitting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light courier tasks
Other (i.e. no exposure to heat, chemical, water, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filing • Desk Work

EARLY / MODIFIED RETURN TO WORK

MODIFIED TASK IDENTIFICATION

Complete this form to prepare for assigning transitional tasks to injured workers with restrictions in your department. Each department should identify tasks that can be performed if employees are assigned to the following restrictions.

DEPARTMENT: _____

RESTRICTIONS	TASKS THAT CAN BE PERFORMED
No Lifting or Carrying	
No Pushing or Pulling	
No Standing or Walking	
No Lifting or Carrying	
No Stooping, Bending, Squatting or Kneeling	
No Overhead Lifting	
No Use of Dominant Arm or Head	
No Prolonged Sitting	
Other (i.e., no exposure to heat, chemicals, water, etc.)	