



# RETURN TO WORK GUIDELINES

## CREATING A GRADUATED RETURN TO WORK PLAN (GRTW)

Returning to work after a concussion is an important step in your recovery. It's important to work with your medical team and your employer to set up a successful return to work (RTW) plan. A good return to work plan should:

- Start with reduced hours and duties and include ample breaks
- Progress hours and duties gradually over a few weeks (or months)
- be adjusted if you find it difficult to progress
- be specific to you and your needs

## GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

- A return to work plan should progress through several phases.
- If your symptoms are tolerable at a given phase, then progress to the next step.
- If symptoms worsen, don't progress to the next phase until symptoms are tolerable
- Remember: your plan should be individualized to you, these are only suggestions.

**PHASE 1: REST** - Take time off work (usually a few days), reduce cognitive exertion and stimulation, avoid driving and overstimulating community environments (eg. stores, crowds). See our **Rest After Concussion** handout for more ideas. Light physical activity is okay at this stage (walking, light chores – if it doesn't make you feel worse)

**PHASE 2: LIGHT COGNITIVE & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** - Up to 30 minutes of cognitive exertion or stimulation at home (eg. reading, computer, TV, conversation, planning/scheduling, cooking). Refrain from attending work, driving or getting overloaded. Continue light physical activity.

**PHASE 3: MODIFIED SEDENTARY WORK** - Return to the workplace and perform menial sedentary work for up to 60 minutes at a time. Avoid multitasking, stress, intense concentration or problem solving, or big decisions. Avoid physical exertion like standing for long periods, lifting, carrying, and driving. You may need to complete a modified or alternative job. Take frequent breaks and work reduced hours (<50% of typical schedule). If this is unavailable at your workplace, complete these activities at home or in the community.

**PHASE 4: MODIFIED WORK** - Continue modified duties outlined above for up to 2 hours at a time. Reduce cognitive strain as much as possible and continue to restrict physical demands (do seated work, occasional standing, no loads greater than 10-20lbs). Continue taking extra breaks (at least every hour) and work reduced hours (up to about 50% of typical schedule).

**PHASE 5: PART TIME LIGHT DUTY WORK** - Work full cognitive duties but continue to restrict physical demands (do seated work, no prolonged standing, no loads greater than 20lbs,). Work up to 75% of your typical schedule.

**PHASE 6: FULL TIME LIGHT DUTY WORK** - Return to full cognitive duties and hours (with light physical demands). If you work in a physically demanding job (deal with lots of movement, lifting, weights >20lbs.) continue on the next page.

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## **FOR A PHYSICAL JOB (eg. construction, trades, manufacturing)**

Consider adding the following steps:

**PHASE 7: FULL TIME MEDIUM DUTY WORK.** Work a full time schedule but restrict weights lifted to 20-50lbs. Avoid any activities that put you at risk for further injury. Be careful with balancing movements (eg. walking at heights or along ledges) and prolonged neck postures (like looking down all day). Take extra breaks.

**PHASE 8: FULL TIME HEAVY DUTY WORK.** Work a full time schedule by restrict weights lifted to 50 - 100lbs. Avoid any activities that put you at risk for further injury. Be careful with balancing movements (eg. walking at heights or along ledges) and prolonged neck postures (like looking down all day). Take extra breaks.

**PHASE 9: FULL TIME VERY HEAVY DUTYWORK.** Work a full time schedule and return to all physical demands. Avoid any activities that put you at risk for further injury. Be careful with balancing movements (eg. walking at heights or along ledges) and prolonged neck postures (like looking down all day). Take extra breaks.



**\*DRIVING AND EQUIPMENT OPERATION.** If you have dizziness, concentration, memory or vision issues (or other issues that increase risk) do not return to driving and heavy equipment operation at work until being cleared by your medical team.

**EVERY WORK PLAN NEEDS TO BE INDIVIDUALIZED.  
THE STEPS OUTLINED HERE ARE ONLY GENERAL SUGGESTIONS.  
WORK WITH YOUR OT TO DEVELOP A SPECIFIC PLAN FOR YOU.**