



Balancing Work with Special Health Needs

Starting to work is an important milestone in a person's life! Staying healthy as you balance work and the rest of your life may be challenging. Your goal is to stay as well as you can so you can be productive at your job.

KNOW YOURSELF. Knowing yourself, your disability, your strengths and your limitations is important for success on the job. Employers want people who can do a job as well or better than someone else, will be there, and will be of value to the company. Find out what you do well and think about what you like to do and what you have difficulty doing. What kinds of jobs fit your strengths, interests and limitations? How can these limitations be modified with supports? Your school, Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, and workforce development agencies can help you learn about your abilities, interests, limitations and supports and help you to match these with skills needed for jobs you want to do. Practice talking with friends about who you are, your strengths, and your disability so you become comfortable talking about yourself with potential employers.

HOW MUCH TO SHARE. Disclosing a disability is an individual choice. The fact that you have a disability should not appear on your resume or in your cover letter. If you have a visible disability, deal with it quickly, openly, and honestly. Anticipate the employer's concerns and emphasize your strengths. When scheduling your interview, inform the scheduler that you will be arriving in a wheelchair and request any accommodations you might need so both of you avoid unpleasant surprises. Express an attitude of accepting your disability, emphasizing your strengths and skills for the job, your dependability and enthusiasm. Be prepared to describe reasonable accommodations you might need to do the job. Often supports are simple and inexpensive.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that an individual does not have to tell a potential employer about medical history until a conditional job offer has been made. Once the offer is made and accepted it is important to disclose the disability if a person needs any disability-related accommodations. Unless disabilities are disclosed and people documented their needs, they will not necessarily be protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

STAYING WELL KEEPS YOU ON THE JOB. Plan ahead to stay well! Consider the types of health care services you need on a daily, weekly and monthly basis? Think about your health care and treatment routines. Which can be done before work, after work or during lunch or break times? Think about how you can keep yourself well.

- *Healthy Inside and Out.* Eat a healthy diet, drink plenty of fluids, take vitamins, get a flu shot, maintain a good weight for you, exercise and take time for fun! Avoid risk-taking behaviors (alcohol, smoking, illegal drugs, driving unsafely, or unsafe sexual practices).
- *Energy Level Up.* Get plenty of rest after work. Your body needs rest to repair itself to maintain good stamina. Do things that are fun and learn how to manage stress.
- *Know Your Body.* Report symptoms to your doctor before you have a serious medical crisis.

- *Make Doctor Visits for Routine Exams.* Regular preventive health exams provide opportunity for your doctor to catch potential problems early and for health education. Ask your health professionals if they have early morning or late afternoon appointments that will help you minimize time away from the job. Consider how much time it takes to get these services including travel and waiting time.
- *Follow Medical Recommendations.* Develop plans with your doctor that take your work expectations into account.
- *Plan Ahead for Supports.* Consider your usual transportation and backup plans, interpreters, and special equipment you might need to make the doctor visit productive.
- *Plan for Health Emergencies.* Consider what types of emergencies you might experience such as illness, accident, problems with medications, or broken equipment. Make a plan for where you will go, how you will get there, what you should take with you, and people you will notify.
- *Paying for Health Care.* Health insurance is a benefit with some jobs. If you have a choice of health plans, which one best meets your medical needs and budget? How much does it cost? Should you continue with Medicaid or Medicare? Does an employer plan allow you to continue seeing the doctors you see now? How much will you have to pay for things you need but are not covered? How much are co-pays? Ask a trusted friend, a work colleague or someone who has similar health needs for advice. Sometimes the office manager at your Doctor's Office can tell you which plans are better for the services you need

Planning Your Work Helps You Stay Well. Maintaining good health habits and planning ahead for both routine health services and emergencies help you be a productive worker and have a good relationship with your co-workers and supervisors. Other ways to plan your work to maintain your health include:

- *Work Hours & Weekly Schedule* – Consider what hours and days of the week you can work. Think about time for health care routines, ongoing medical care, and rest to maintain stamina for work. Sometimes working full time is too much. How many work hours per week are required to get employee health insurance? Some companies provide benefits to employees who work at least 32 hours a week. If traditional work hours conflict with your medical routines or transportation needs, ask about flexible time – different start times, part-time hours to start and working toward full-time, job-sharing, or telework options. How many vacation days and sick days do you earn, and what is the procedure for taking these? What are your employer's policies about taking time off and/or changing your schedule to get medical care? Will the medical care that you need be available on days and times when you are not scheduled to work?
- *Healthy Work Environments* – Think about the environment you need to stay well. For example, you may need to be in an air-conditioned room or have a consistently warm room. Do you have allergies or are you sensitive to perfumes and other smells? Will you be able to work in a position that is comfortable for you – sit, stand or recline? Do you need an electrical outlet to plug in medical equipment?
- *Health Routines at Work.* Consider what medications or medical treatments must be done during the time that you are scheduled to work. Can you do this during regular breaks or will you need longer time periods? Can you handle this by yourself, or do you need some help, and if so how will you get the help? What do you need to tell your employer and co-workers about your health care needs so they can help you?
- *Disability Maintenance, Prescriptions & Medical Supplies:* If you need to make phone calls or search the Internet for information or order supplies related to your needs, do it on breaks. Most durable medical companies will come to your work-site to do minor repairs (wheelchair, van lifts.). Order all your necessary monthly medications at one time to reduce multiple trips to the pharmacy and consider home delivery. Some health plans allow for mail order of prescriptions. Arrange for medical supplies to be delivered to your house or pick them up before or after work. This will reduce your time away from work.

- *Emergency Plan* – Plan for notification of your supervisor when you have an emergency and cannot come to work. Plan for the help you might need if your workplace must be evacuated quickly, if the elevators do not work, or the accessible exit cannot be used?

KEEPING YOUR JOB depends upon your being able to come to work and perform your designated job duties. Not being at work leaves the rest of the staff short-handed and can reflect poorly on your performance. It is important that you feel comfortable talking with your employer about health care issues that could affect your ability to perform your job. The best time to inform your employer about a health care issue that could affect your job is when your health condition is stable so that you and your employer can plan ahead and make necessary accommodations.

YOU - the employee – Your responsibilities regarding health-related issues at work include:

- *Policies and Procedures* - Follow company rules regarding absenteeism, tardiness and use of leave time. Follow acceptable dress code and personal hygiene behavior.
- *Communicate* - Keep your employer informed about health care issues that may cause you to miss work and if needed, ask her/him to alter your work schedule to accommodate the health related issue allowing you to still maintain a full work load and be productive.
- *Speak Up!* Be able to advocate for yourself regarding accommodations needed at work and have the ability to determine their effectiveness.
- *Supports to Succeed* – If you need assistive technology or additional training to help you better perform your job duties, be able to discuss it with your employer describing the benefits and the costs.
- *Laws That Protect You* - Be familiar with federal and state laws, policies, rights, and responsibilities for adults with disabilities. Know your rights regarding accommodations and physical accessibility at the workplace.
- *Your Strengths & Concerns* - Know your abilities and limitations to reduce the chance of being placed in an undesirable/unhealthy situation. Talk with someone about your feelings and needs. This could be a professional counselor, a member of the clergy, or an employee assistance counselor. Ask adults who have health needs similar to yours for recommendations on how to balance work and health needs.
- *Manage Your Time Well.* When you must take time off for health maintenance, set priorities and accomplish the most important projects first. Delegate responsibilities when you can. Pace yourself; don't do so much in one area that you can't be effective in another.
- *A Little Help from Friends.* Sometimes you can find support from willing co-workers - natural supports that can be an effective way to make a job work well for everyone.
- *Have a Plan B.* Have back-up plans for transportation and know how to use public and private options to get you to and from necessary appointments. A low-cost method of transportation when other options aren't available or are too expensive is to utilize the buddy system if both parties agree to assist one another in times of need. Ask ahead of time if a telework option is possible when you cannot get to work due to transportation or health problems,

YOUR BOSS – the employer - responsibilities regarding health related issues at work include:

- *Compliant with Federal Laws* - Follow federal and state laws regarding accommodations and physical access for persons with disabilities. Inform employees of laws, regulations and company policy and procedures.
- *Work Together To Solve Problems* - Be open to discussing the employee's health-related issues that could have an impact on the employee's job performance and work together to find solutions or accommodations.



WEB RESOURCES on work and special health care needs:

DISABILITYINFO

<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov> - Website of the federal government that is a starting point for all government services and information sites

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, OFFICE OF DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu> JAN provides a toll-free consulting service that offers information about job accommodations and employment for people with disabilities. (They offer only information, not help in getting a job). Also lots of information about the ADA., and lot of other links. Section for consumers has detailed fact sheets on accommodations for many disabling conditions, tip sheet for seeking employment, sample letters requesting on-the-job accommodations. Also information for employers, government offices, educational programs and more. .

EARN - Employee Assistance Referral Network

<http://www.earnworks.com> - offers other resources for job seekers.

Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration youth site

http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services/

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info> - offers information for youth with disabilities especially related to work.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

<http://www.studentjobs.gov> - contains specific info about funding for education and employment

<http://www.worksupport.com> - Clearinghouse for information, resources, research and training related to the employment of people with disabilities.

EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT INSTITUTE of Virginia Commonwealth University

<http://www.vcu.edu/busweb/esi> - Site offers WorkWorld© training, free software and information to help people with disabilities make better decisions about employment by using "decision-support software" to get accurate answers about earning money, eligibility for government health benefits and understanding the impact of work incentives. Software for free download at <http://www.workworld.org>.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY

<http://www.nod.org/findingjobs>

Site offers lots of advice about job-hunting, resume writing, ADA, resources, employment success stories

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov>

Information on youth with disabilities, transition and employment issues

Job Hunting Guide for Colorado Citizens with Disabilities

<http://www.coloradocareer.net/Disabilities.pdf>

Detailed guidance for job seeking and job maintenance

Developed by the HRTW National Center <http://www.hrtw.org> and
the KY Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs: <http://chs.ky.gov/commissionkids>
1-800-232-1160