Injury and case management

A practical guide to dealing with return to work after work injury

Return to Work Matters
The power of partnerships

www.rtwmatters.org

Produced by the RTWMatters team to assist employers improve workplace systems and practices

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Injury and case management

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Publisher
Robert Hughes

Managing Editor
Dr Mary Wyatt

Writers
Dr Mary Wyatt
Gabrielle Lis

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A practical guide to dealing with return to work after work injury

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by Return To Work Matters Pty Ltd

RTWMatters is a dedicated resource for professionals who assist people to remain at work or return to work.

The material is freely availble to members of RTWMatters.org

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1 The first five minutes

The first conversation is vital! The style of communication used will determine whether the worker feels assured or incensed. Show genuine interest. Ask the worker how he or she is feeling and how you can help them.

Principles of return to work management

- "It's we, we, we, not me, me, me" - Work in partnership
- Be respectful
- Listen to the worker's needs and concerns
- Be candid and upfront
- Accommodate the worker where possible

Don't pre-judge, or assume what they are feeling - ask them and take their answer seriously. Listen to what the worker needs, be mindful of their concerns, take the situation seriously.

In most claims that result in litigation, the initial conversation was the starting point for *blame and resentment.*

Arrange care

Assess How much pain the worker is in. Whether they need urgent or non-urgent care. Respond to what the worker asks for.

File an incident report and inform those in the workplace that need to know.

Consider the worker's personality when assessing their needs:

Some people don't want to make a fuss about an injury, and will not raise concerns. Be aware of physical or emotional changes in a self-reliant person that can signal that they are not coping and need help.

Anxious people, on the other hand, need extra attention. They need you to stop and listen, to acknowledge their problem. Reassure anxious workers that you will

support them and make sure they get the care they need.

Emergency	Urgent care	Non-urgent care
• Call 000.	• Arrange an immediate doctor's visit, or take the worker to the hospital (if it is after hours)	• Do you or the worker need a medical opinion? If so, arrange a doctor's appointment at their convenience.
• Contact the worker's family	• Accompany the worker	Should the worker go home or stay at work?
• Accompany the worker to the hospital	• Make sure they get home safely	• Are their alternative duties they could undertake while they aren't 100% fit?
• Let co-workers know what is happening	• Pay the bill	• Discuss the options with the worker.
		• Listen to what the person needs and be aware that they may not want to be troublesome.

The next steps

Make the place safe

Address any occupational health and safety issues that the injury has revealed as quickly as possible. Engage co-workers in the safety planning process.

Obtain an accident report from the injured worker as soon as possible and respond to all evident physical causes of any accident.

Follow up with the employee. A simple phone call, or a card can make the worker feel cared for. If the worker feels valued they are more likely to return to the workplace as soon as possible. Communicate with co-workers about the issue and address any health and safety concerns. Start exploring what contributed to the problem.

In the next 48 hours:

Assess the complexities of the situation and plan for the return to work. After discussion with the worker take steps toward resolving any workplace issues that contributed to the injury or illness.Arrange to communicate with the worker frequently during their recovery.

What happens during the ***first five minutes*** after an injury, ***sets the tone*** for everything that follows.

Respond to the worker in a way that shows they are valued, and they are likely to respond in kind.

What's next?

In the next 48 hours

2 The first 48 hours

Follow up with the employee. A simple phone call, or a card can make the worker feel cared for. If the worker feels valued they are more likely to return to the workplace as soon as possible. Communicate with co-workers about the issue and address any health and safety concerns. Start exploring what contributed to the problem.

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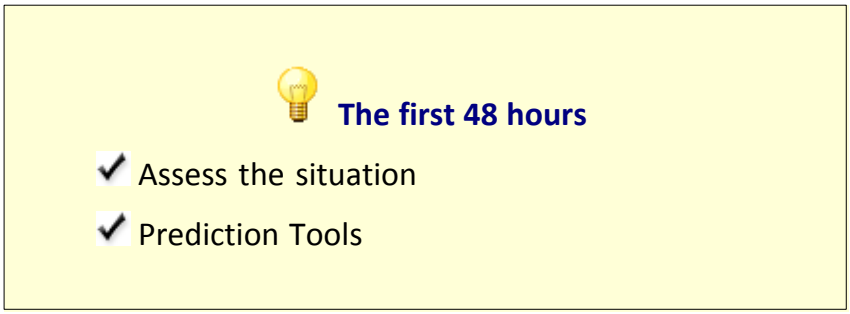
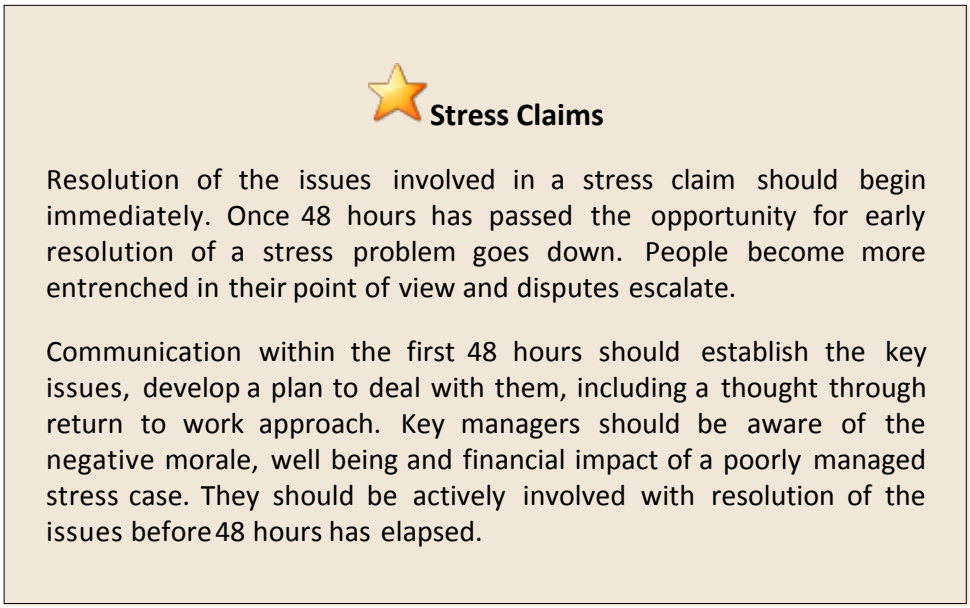




2.1 Assess the situation

In some instances a worker may not report the injury face to face. Many conditions become worse the following day and are reported at that time.

Encourage reporting, but don't be surprised if you hear about a problem a day or two after it started.

Minor sprains and strains are common and are a normal part of life. If all minor aches were reported, companies would need a full time staff member just to deal with the paperwork.

Within 48 hours the initial conversations with the worker, the doctor and the supervisor have taken place. Identify what further information you need to plan your next steps and move forward. Set up communication channels, plan the approach, get things happening. As the RTW Co-ordinator we seek to understand:

1. What is the nature of the injury?

2. Are restrictions necessary?

Note: *work can be an important part of therapy*

- What are the worker's expectations regarding:
  - Duties they can do at work – normal or modified normal duties
  - Return to work date if off work?
  - Restrictions?
  - What is the treater's view of restrictions the injury imposes?
  - What is the treater's estimate of the recuperation period?

3. What other factors need to be considered?

- Assess the employee's general personality and outlook.
  - What is the quality of the worker's relationship to their job, supervisor and co-workers?

- Have there been recent issues that impact on goodwill?
  - Recent job change
  - Personality conflict
  - Industrial relations issues
  - Other long term cases that may have influenced the employee's perception
  - Home or personal factors

4. Communication

- The extent of communication depends on the complexity of the situation
- Simple case
  - Keep a loop going with the supervisor and employee
  - Ensure there is regular and productive communication
  - Get involved if there is not
- Complex case - Who else needs to be involved?
  - Senior management – a call from a senior manager / company owner to enquire after the person's well being makes a huge difference. The worker feels supported, co workers understand the importance of the situation and the supervisor listens differently.
  - HR should be involved in cases:
    - Where IR is important
    - There have been performance management issues
    - Where other assistance may be needed, such as time off work for other reasons, pay concerns, an Employee Assistance Program needs to be used
  - Production manager can help identify other duties

Communicate

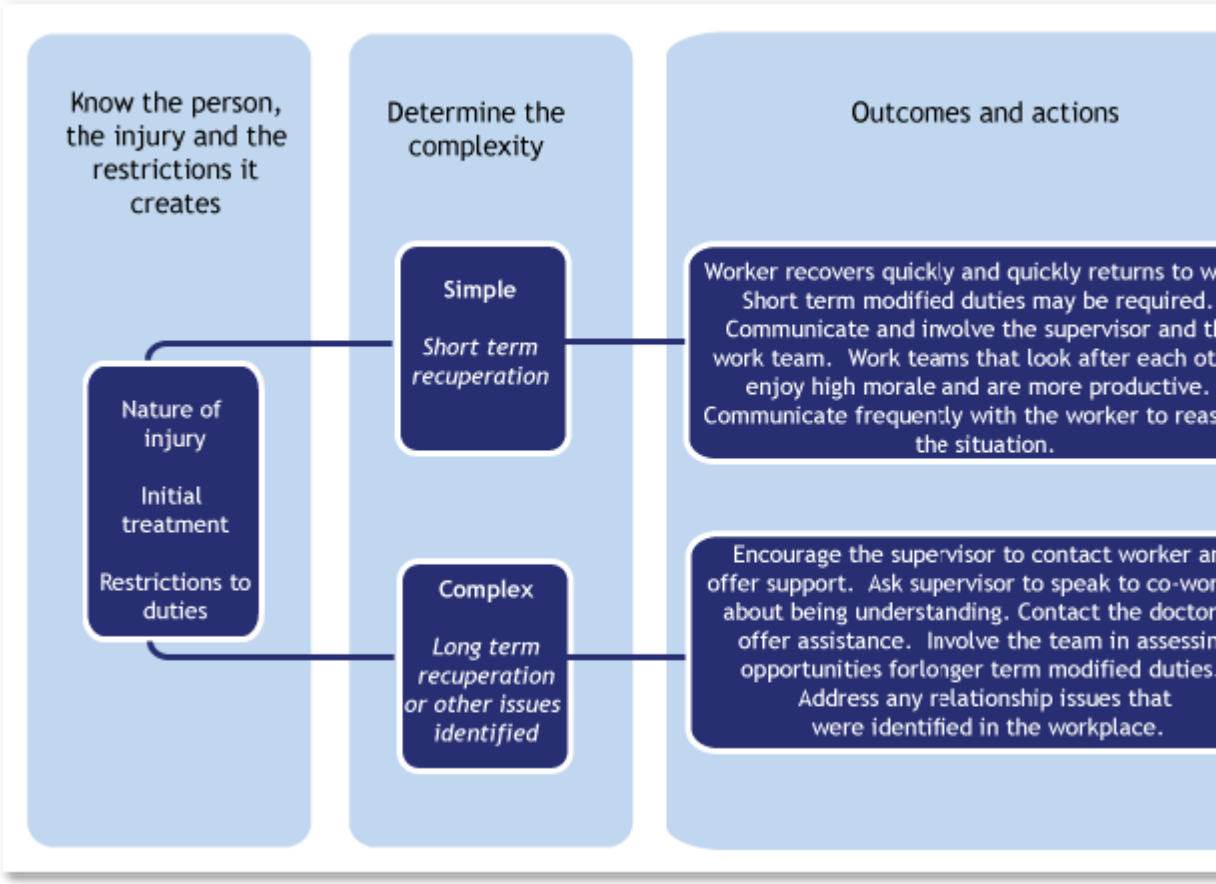
In addition to your personal contact, ensure messages of support are sent to the injured worker. e.g flowers, or a card signed by management and co-workers. If possible have a senior manager contact the person by telephone.

In conversation, ask questions and use active listening to keep communication channels open. Set a time when you will follow up again. Assure the person that you are there to help when the time is right to discuss returning to work.

5. Duties

- Check with employee whether the duties they are doing are satisfactory. Are they coping, do th anything else, are they being looked after.

If, for example, the worker has a pre-existing issue with their supervisor, take this into consideration with these matters constructively will ensure the worker feels understood and supported. It also cr opportunity to improve the workplace environment that the worker will return to. Knowing the perso attitudes of the worker help identify the best way to communicate with them and what boundaries protect the team from a difficult worker.



What's next?

Prediction Tools

2.2 Prediction tools

There are certain risk factors that can be used to predict whether an absence from work may become long term. The strongest prediction tool is the injured worker's own idea of when they can return to work. If the worker does not feel they can return to work, a proactive management approach will be needed, including help working on their motivation and self confidence. Other factors that can increase time off work include whether the person's mobility is reduced, or if they report job stress. Identify the source of stress. If it is found in the workplace negotiate to reduce the cause. Reducing stress will make the workplace safer for everyone and get injured workers back to work more quickly. *Below is a questionnaire to measure the risk of long term absence.*

Risk Indicator Questionnaire

1. **How long does the worker think they will need off work?**

   .....Days, ...Weeks, ...Months

2. **Has the worker been treated by a doctor?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. **Is the mobility limited by their condition?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. **Does the worker report job stress?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. **Is the worker frustrated in their job?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

6. **Do they have satisfactory relationships with their co-workers?**

   ☐ Yes ☐ No

The more 'Yes' answers, and the longer the absence, the higher the risk of work disability.

What's next?

Getting medical care

3 Getting medical care

When arranging medical care it is best to err on the side of safety. If there is a question of a fracture or other significant condition arrange an ambulance or hospital attendance.

For sprains and strains seek the employee and first aider's input – do they think a doctor should be seen that day, or wait until the next available appointment.

Getting medical care

- ✔ Getting an appointment / Understanding how a medical practice works
- ✔ Choosing the right place to get care
- ✔ Relationships and your approach
- ✔ Transport issues

3.1 Getting an appointment / Understanding how a medical practice works:

Timing of the appointment

Emergency
• Call 000 • Contact the worker's family • Accompany the worker to hospital • Communicate with co-workers
To the doctor that day
• Arrange an immediate doctor's visit or take the worker to hospital (if it is after hours) • Accompany the worker

- Make sure they have transport to get home

Non-urgent care

- Does the worker require a medical opinion? If so, arrange a doctor's appointment.
- Discuss whether the worker should go home or stay at work.

Getting medical care can be difficult, many doctors are booked out. Having a relationship with a local clinic helps.

The receptionist or practice manager has influence over the appointment scheduling. Be straight about your needs. A request for an urgent appointment needs to be just that, otherwise the next request for an urgent appointment is not likely to be successful.

If you do not have a relationship with a specific clinic it may be necessary to call a few practices to arrange an appointment.

Private Vs's Public Hospital Care

It is Private hospitals allow you to choose your doctor. Preferable to admit the injured worker to the care of an experienced specialist, as this will result in better continuity of care.

If the injured worker is admitted to a public hospital, the initial care can be followed up by a chosen specialist.

Clinics that specialize in occupational or industrial medicine are geared to deal with urgent appointments. There are industrial medicine clinics in many regional towns and all capital cities.

Some private hospitals have specialized industrial medicine setups, they are geared to deal with the type of injuries that occur in industry, and their doctors are focused on good levels of care for work related conditions.

Public versus private hospital. If an ambulance is called you can request the patient is transferred to the nearest private hospital with an emergency facility. However, this will be at the ambulance officers' discretion. It will depend on how close the hospitals are and how busy they are at the time.

If you are going to transport the employee to the hospital, you can call ahead to see how busy they are. A hospital 30 minutes away might save the employee and supervisor six hours of waiting time.

What's next?

Choosing the right place to get care

3.2 Choosing the right place to get care

Doctors who are focused on RTW get better outcomes, although part of this might be that the patients who choose the company doctor are more interested in return to work

Choosing the right place to get care:

To get the best care, choose a doctor who understands the issues involved in return to work, one who communicates in a straightforward manner and makes the patient an active part of the recovery process. A doctor who cares about patient outcomes.

Industrial or occupational clinics are focused on managing work injuries. They are also focused on helping get the person back to work. Research has shown doctors who are focused on RTW get better outcomes, although part of this might be that the patients who choose the company doctor are more interested in return to work. Talk to the clinic's practice manager about your needs and theirs. Are the best doctors interested in this area of work? What can you do to support them provide the best care?

How to get the best care:

- When you find the right clinic build trust with the doctors, work collaboratively and maintain positive communication. Go to the practice and meet the staff. Give them information about your workplace, develop a human 'face' for your organisation.
- Pay the doctor on time and appropriately, including for time spent on phone calls. Let them know you will do this. It will allow them to spend the time required on all the issues and communicate well with the patient and you.
- Doctors are paid less for managing work injuries even though these cases are generally more complex and take longer. Medical costs are a small part of case costs, if you pay well for high levels of service by the doctor the employee is likely to have a better result.
- Support the doctor by clarity in your communication, the key information needed by the workplace is about the person's capacity for work. Be positive and helpful in your approach and you are more likely to get that in return.

Employee choice of provider:

The employee has the right to choose their own doctor. If they want to see their usual doctor, ask if they would like assistance arranging an appointment.

The quality of your communication becomes more important if you do not know the doctor, or the doctor does not know your organisation.

What's next?

Relationships and your approach

3.3 Relationships and your approach

Relationships underpin most of the work doctors do. They develop relationships with their patients, with the specialists they use, with allied health practitioners such as physios, and with other organizations. If the doctor knows how you work and what you can do for their patient they are more likely to work with you. You can let the doctor know about this in many ways:

- Via a letter that accompanies the patient that outlines what you can do.
- Via an email or fax sent before the employee is seen
- Via a phone call

The communication should let the doctor know:

- You care about the employee
- You care about the outcome
- Your willingness to assist in best practice care
- That you would like a call or communication from the doctor about the outcome of the consultation.
- That you will pay for the associated costs.

One of the best ways to establish a positive relationship with the doctor is for the employer to have a good relationship with the employee. The doctor's primary relationship is with their patient, so if the patient (employee) is positive about the workplace the doctor will usually "follow suit".

What's next?

Transport issues

3.4 Transport issues

Care for your employee as you would care for an injured family member.

Transport to and from medical care can be a major issue. People who are unwell or having difficulty moving, struggle to transport themselves. Even if they are off work they should be supported to get to a medical appointment.

People who can assist include:

- site first aider
- their supervisor
- a trusted family member may be called

People may also need transport help getting home from medical care, or from the workplace. Assistance with transport sends a strong message to the employee in need. **Months after the injury people remember the company's approach on the first day.**

Care for your employee as you would care for an injured family member

Months after the injury people remember the company's approach on the first day

What's next?

The first week

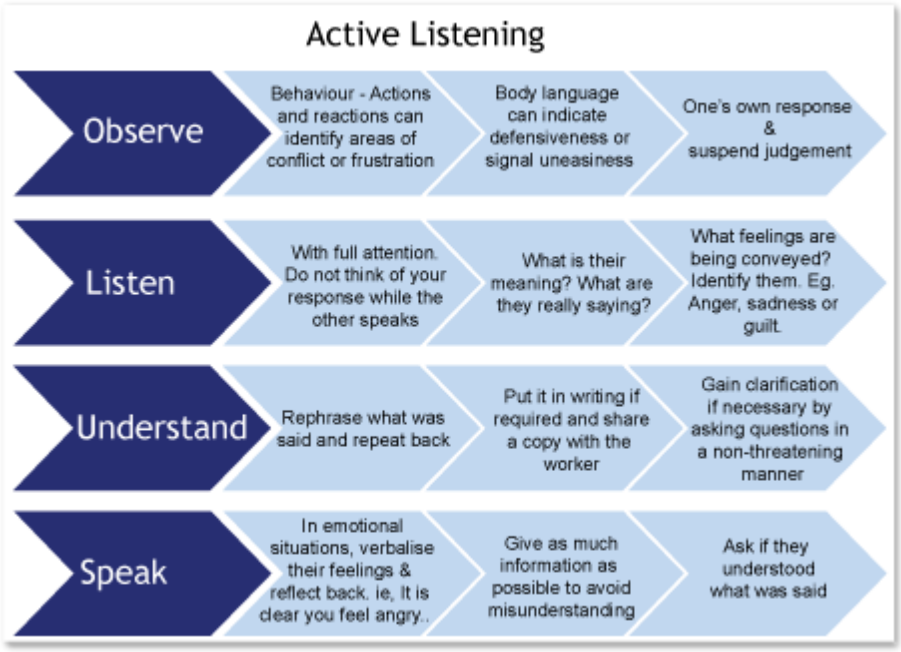
4 The first week

In the first week, expand on the issues identified and the plans made. Continue to communicate with everyone involved in the employee's return to work. Work with the employee to assign appropriate duties. If applicable, submit claim forms for the injury at this stage.

4.1 Ongoing Communication:

The Key Elements
• **Establish rapport** • **Communicate with relevant parties** • **Understand the injury and any relevant issues** • **Assess health needs** • **Ensure best possible treatment** • **Set up the conditions for a return to work**

Regular communication is vital to effective injury management. Talk to the injured worker, the doctor, supervisors and co-workers. Encourage co-workers to communicate. Use 'Active Listening' techniques to ensure everyone is on the same page, stay in control of the flow of communication:



Is the employee satisfied with their care?

How is the worker going? Are they satisfied with their treatment, with you, the support offered?

Encourage your worker to take control of their recovery through an active and positive approach to their treatment. Encourage them to ask questions in order to understand their injury and feel comfortable in being upfront and honest about their needs. If the employee is not happy with their treater, explain they have the choice of treater.

Are you satisfied with the care your employee is receiving?

Has the doctor explained to the worker that there will be an acceptable level of pain in the recovery process and that fear and avoidance of painful activities could cause more harm? Have the benefits of work as therapy been discussed?

Forms, forms and forms

Incident forms

Must always be used and kept on record. Download sample incident report in word format

Claim forms

The worker needs to understand it is their decision whether to lodge a claim.

Medical forms

Restrictions listed on medical certificates are the first step in negotiating work duties. Restrictions can be discussed and may need clarification with the doctor.

What's next?

Return to work management

4.2 Return to work management

What happens if a claim is disputed:

The insurer or claims agent may make the decision to assess or dispute the claim. It is important to learn what is involved and how to manage the process so the claim can be thoroughly assessed.

1. The supervisor's role

The supervisor's response to an injured worker is one of the most important influences on the quality and speed of the worker's recovery and return to work. Don't expect supervisors to understand this, or that they know how to deal with return to work. Find out about the supervisor's competencies in this area and support them where necessary, including in understanding the importance of their role:

An effective supervisor:

- *Listens to the employee's issues, concerns and needs*
- *Will already have a relationship with the employee that allows them to discuss return to work*
- *Leads the process by offering useful duties, working with the employee to sort out meaningful tasks*
- *Keeps in touch with the employee, e.g. Calls them at home if off work, checks in on them during the day if at work*
- *Identifies barriers to communication and is able to overcome them*
- *Plans and facilitates the work duties until the condition has settled*
- *Communicates with the employee if things are not progressing satisfactorily*
- *Recognizes differing behavioral needs and expectations of people and is able to deal with these differences*
- *Suggests ways the job can be modified to accommodate the employee's condition, e.g. have the person run a machine, but help out with occasional lifting*
- *Doesn't molly coddle the worker*

2. Getting all the relevant information

Most information will be to hand by the end of the first week. If there is any doubt check with the employee or other staff yourself. It is easy for situations to be misunderstood and this can lead to long term problems.

For example, the line manager might advise that the person was not doing the type of work reported to cause the condition. Armed with that information claims staff at the insurer may consider disputing the claim. Checking the facts to ensure accuracy in the first place is vital, an unnecessary dispute is one of the most common ways to get the worker offside. If the facts are wrong, time and energy has been misspent, the employee will feel they are not believed, not trusted. Like begets like.

3. Communicating with all parties

Employee

Set up regular times to catch up with the worker
Let them know who to contact if they have a concern, e.g. supervisor, HR, production manager
Tell them it is important they communicate
Advise them who to call, or speak to if there is a problem; provide back up contact personnel in case the first person is not available
Explain the claims process and offer the relevant forms
Let them know what the company's policy is on work disability
Let them know that their responsibilities regarding return to work are:

- Attend work consistently
- Provide input on duties
- Comply with rehabilitation endeavors
- Be a positive part of the process

Supervisor

Is the supervisor satisfied with the case progress?
Do they need additional support or back up?
Do they have an adequate understanding of:

- The restrictions?
- How long the restrictions will be needed

Are co-workers being helpful, is further communication required in that context?

Treater

Keep it simple
Put it in writing if necessary, by fax, email or letter
Be clear about the company's support for the worker
Ask for clarification when needed. Make sure you understand.

Claims manager

Keep them up to date on communication with the worker. Provide all documentation in relation to the claim.

4. Agreeing on duties

A team approach is best, include the worker by asking them what they think they can handle. Keep in mind that it is better for the worker to remain with their normal co-workers if possible. It is best if the worker's duties are a useful contribution to their work team and the workplace. Think outside the square if necessary.

Next:
What happens if a claim is disputed?

5 What's Next...

We hope you've found our Injury and Case Management Handbook extract informative and useful.

You may find the full 97 page edition helpful if:

- You struggle to identify high risk cases that can lead to larger and longer claims. Our detailed checklist demonstrates how to determine red flags and take a proactive intervention early on.
- You aren't aware that after 3 weeks off work there is a 30% chance the employee will not return in the same capacity. We'll show you how to improve those chances.
- You'd like a step by step guide on how to dispute a claim properly and avoid escalating claim cost. Which incidentally can add $10,000 to $50,0000 if not properly managed.
- You are interested in knowing the barriers to successful return to work so you can remove them from the situation.
- You aren't sure how to draw up effective and responsive RTW plans including deciding on the correct return to work duties.

You can get your free eBook copy of the full Injury and Case Management Handbook of Successful RTW and access to our other online handbooks such as Workplace Systems Handbook by becoming a member of Return to Work Matters. Click here to get it now.

What is Return to Work Matters? And what do you get out of being a member?

Return to Work Matters (www.rtwmatters.org) is an online resource of return to work and disability management professionals as well as employers wanting to help injured or ill employees to recover their health and get back to their jobs.

Return to Work Matters is your portal for RTW and includes, RTW discussions, news, case studies, research updates, downloadable tools and an international support network.

Practical information you can use today. All evidence based, all guided by experts in the field.

Not only do you get access to our growing list of step by step handbooks, you also get access to hundreds of articles and resources covering a multitude of topics. You'll also be supported by our weekly newsletter outlining all new content and recent industry news.

Click here to join today. For more information on how Return to Work Matters can improve your RTW outcomes, please visit www.rtwmatters.org or email info@rtwmatters.org.

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