

WORK

Living with chronic pain can impact your ability to work or maintain the career path you had prior to developing pain. If you continue in the same role or position, it's likely you may need to make adjustments. If the work you are doing is no longer feasible, finding other forms of income can be an even bigger adjustment. An important part of transitioning back to work is communicating with co-workers and employers about what you need in order to manage pain successfully.

GOING BACK TO WORK AFTER A DIAGNOSIS

- Communication is one of the most important skills when transitioning back to work.
- Chronic pain is often as an “invisible illness,” which means it's important to tell those who need to know about your situation about your symptoms and what helps or makes your pain worse.
- It can be challenging to open up to others about your condition, especially in a professional setting, but it can be immensely helpful in ensuring you receive the support you are entitled to.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

- Under Canadian human rights law, employers have a duty to accommodate disability in the workplace. “Disability” has a specific legal definition.
- For those with active cases with WorkSafeBC, regulations state that chronic pain is considered pain that persists six months after an injury, beyond the usual recovery time.
- WorkSafeBC classifies chronic pain into three subcategories:
 - Specific proportionate: Pain that has a clear medical cause and is proportionate to the injury or underlying condition.
 - Specific disproportionate: Pain that has a clear medical cause but is disproportionate to the injury or underlying condition.
 - Non-specific disproportionate: Pain that does not have a clear medical cause.
- If WorkSafeBC accepts chronic pain on your claim, they may grant you health care benefits, such as a referral to a therapist or to a pain management program.
- If your chronic pain is one of the disproportionate types noted above, WorkSafeBC should assess you for a permanent partial disability award over and above any award that you have received for any other condition.

If your chronic pain impacts your ability to perform your pre-injury job, you may be entitled to vocational rehabilitation benefits. WorkSafeBC defines this as a collaborative process that helps you safely transition

back to the job you were doing, or to other suitable employment. To read more about vocational rehabilitation benefits, please visit the WorkSafeBC website here:

<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/claims/benefits-services/vocational-rehabilitation>

DEALING WITH FEAR OF JUDGEMENT

- Carefully research and choose whom to disclose your health information to.
- Keep it simple; personal details aren't always necessary.
- When you're feeling anxious, you're more likely to misunderstand what others are thinking or saying. Take a moment to reflect and ask for clarification if you're unsure about a conversation.
- In the process of returning to work and personal disclosure, people may intentionally or unintentionally cause offence, which can be hurtful. If the situation interferes with your work, quality of work life or relationships at work, seek help from people you trust professionally or personally. It's best to get it resolved as soon as possible.
- Evaluate and celebrate. Make time to reflect outside of the workplace on how things have been going. Be sure to acknowledge your successes, even the small ones.

RESOURCES

- https://www.liveplanbc.ca/pain-education/work_and_finances
- https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/employment-business-and-economic-development/employment-standards-workplace-safety/workers-advisers-office/factsheets/chronic_pain.pdf
- https://bchrc.net/creating_inclusive_workplaces_through_accommodation/
- <https://www.healthcentral.com/category/chronic-pain>
- <https://www.glassdoor.com/blog/chronic-illness/>
- Neil Squire Society, a national not-for-profit organization that empowers Canadians with disabilities through accessible assistive technology, computer skills tutoring, employment support, and research and development - <https://www.neilsquire.ca/>