

Supporting attendance at work

Muscle, bone and joint conditions



everyone fit
for the future

We know supporting the health and wellbeing of their teams is important to all of our people managers and this brief guide has been developed to provide information on good practice related to health and wellbeing.

Did you know?

That across the UK:

The **most common** causes of long-term absence are acute medical conditions, stress, musculoskeletal injuries, mental ill health, and back pain.

Musculoskeletal injuries and back pain remain among the top causes of both long- and short-term absence, particularly among manual workers.



That in Network Rail:

20% of known absence relates to musculoskeletal issues with an average duration of **13.6 days** per episode.

Estimates for cost of absence indicate that musculoskeletal absence cost is **£8.58m**.

£8.58m

Early Intervention

Early intervention such as referral to occupational health, can make a difference in reducing recovery time.

One of the most common reasons for sickness absence at Network Rail are musculoskeletal issues. These issues are normally related to muscle, tendon or ligament damage to the back, arm, shoulder or lower limb – and occasionally, can be caused by work-related activities, including manual handling. Poor working practices, physical resilience and/ or poor posture can aggravate the issue or make someone more likely to suffer a musculoskeletal issue.

Advice on musculoskeletal issues has changed – and getting staff back to work earlier is now known to help speed up their recovery. The aim of managing an employee in this situation is to prevent further recurrence of the issue and further injury.

What do I need to do?

1 Early referral is best

It's well documented that early intervention, especially with musculoskeletal issues, helps to:

- Quicken recovery time.
- Enable an early return to work.
- Prevent long-term issues, including future absence, from arising.

Early referrals to occupational health can advise on intervention and treatment for your employee and information on how you can support them in their return to work and what reasonable adjustments could be made on their return.

② Consider reasonable adjustments

Reasonable adjustments should always be considered for employees who have been absent from work due to a musculoskeletal issue. These are often temporary for a fixed period of time. The majority of reasonable adjustments will help employees to stay at work until they are able to return to their normal substantive role.

A reasonable adjustment could be:

- Reviewing their current role to determine whether there are any activities that could be aggravating their injury. For instance, do they carry out continual repetitive movements, carry out work in a fixed body position or work in a way that forces concentrated movements on small parts of their body, like their hand or wrist?
- Reviewing their pace of work. Does their work allow for sufficient rest between any manual handling activities?
- An alternative method for carrying out their normal tasks? Can these be altered? Are there any changes to equipment that should be carried out?
- Considering a phased-return to work, where an employee can build up to their contractual hours over a fixed period of time.
- Desk adjustments including desk height, chair, keyboard etc. There are also Voice to Text software packages and digital pens that can support people whose musculoskeletal issues are aggravated by keyboard work.

It's important that any reasonable adjustments are reviewed at set dates, to allow for plans to be modified, or for employees to return to their normal role. Review dates can be agreed when setting out the original plan with the employee. Employees should be encouraged to give feedback on their return to work plan.

③ Open conversations

Encourage your employees to tell you when musculoskeletal problems develop, so that early interventions can be identified and any reasonable work adjustments can be made.

④ Make and maintain contact during sickness absence

Make and maintain regular contact with employees whilst they are off sick.

Visit the Health and Wellbeing Portal:

<https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/HelpingOthers/Supporting-wellbeing-at-work/Supporting-attendance-at-work>



⑤ Return to work

A return to work meeting with the employee is recommended when they return to work.

Visit the Health and Wellbeing Portal:

<https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/HelpingOthers/Supporting-wellbeing-at-work/Supporting-attendance-at-work>



⑥ Medication advice

Queries about medication advice should be made to medication enquiries FAQs:

<http://connectdocs/NetworkRail/Documents/CorporateServices/HR/InformationCentre/OccupationalHealth/Medication%20Enquiries%20FAQ.pdf>

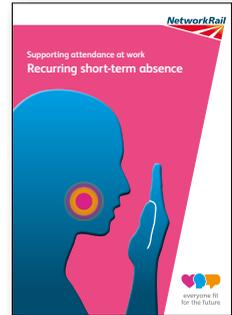
Myth busting

- ✗ **Bed rest and avoidance of day-to-day activities has been shown to reduce absence from musculoskeletal issues.**
- ✓ Employees who suffer from back pain should be encouraged to come back to work, where possible. They should try to remain active, take pain relief if indicated and seek medical attention if appropriate.
- ✗ **You need to be 100% fit to return to work.**
- ✓ People heal from injury and illness over time and getting back to normal activities, including work, is part of that process.

Recap

Early intervention is best: this will speed up recovery time and facilitate an early return to work.

Refer to occupational health: to further identify what support you can put in place for the employee.



Supporting attendance at work

At Network Rail there are various resources and support mechanisms available to you if you are concerned about your employees' muscle, bone and joint conditions.

① Employee Assistance Programme

Call 0800 358 4858 or 0330 332 9980
www.validium.com/vclub

② Occupational health provider

<https://safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing/HelpingOthers/Supporting-wellbeing-at-work/Occupational-Health>

③ Health and Wellbeing Portal

<https://www.safety.networkrail.co.uk/healthandwellbeing>

④ Reasonable Adjustments Policy

<http://connectdocs/NetworkRail/Documents/CorporateServices/HR/InformationCentre/EmployeeHandbook/ReasonableAdjustmentPolicy.pdf>

⑤ Reasonable adjustments guidelines

<http://connectdocs/NetworkRail/Documents/UsefulResources/DisabilityIssues/Everyone-Managing-Disability-in-the-Workplace-Reasonable-Adjustment.pdf>