

How do I find suitable duties for a worker recovering from a mental injury?

Employer resource



Watch the video

Helping your worker to get back to work safely after a mental injury is important for recovery. It can help them to get better sooner, keeps them connected to the workplace and boosts morale.

Tasks your worker can do while they're recovering are called 'suitable duties'. This can mean making changes to how, when or where they do their work. Employers also have an obligation to offer suitable duties under Queensland law.

Tips for finding suitable duties for a worker recovering from a mental injury:

1 Focus on what your worker can do

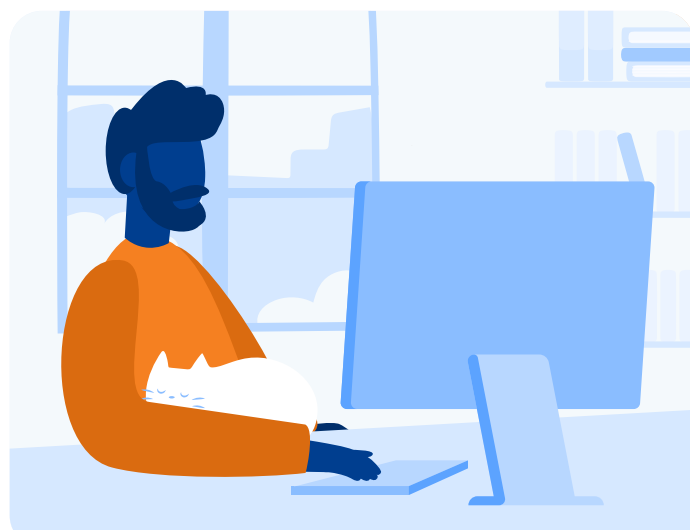
By focusing on your worker and their strengths and abilities, you'll help everyone stay positive.

2 Be flexible

Being flexible with your worker as they recover helps them to build up confidence. This might look like offering reduced hours or days, different tasks, or an alternative workplace setting like remote work.

3 Prioritise open communication

Talk with your worker regularly and listen to their needs and concerns. This shows you care and helps with making any adjustments along the way.



Some questions to think about and discuss with your worker, if appropriate:

- How long can your worker concentrate for at a time?
- Do they need different tasks or the ability to take regular breaks?
- Mental illness and medications can affect different people in different ways, such as concentration or coping with noise. Don't assume, though - ask your worker what that means for them.
- Does your worker find it easier getting written or verbal instructions, or both?
- How often would they like you to check in on them?
- Lots of people find their first day back challenging. Would they find it helpful to have a buddy when first returning to work?
- How many people can they be around? Is noise or the work environment making things harder for them?
- Are there any impacts on their working relationships?



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Some tips for open communication:

- Ask if anything specific makes their injury or illness worse and discuss what supports you can provide, such as reasonable adjustments.
- Listen and reflect back what you have heard to check you have understood. Focus on the future, not the past.
- If you're not sure, ask your worker. Don't make any assumptions, just keep asking open questions that show you care about their mental health.
- Be proactive – suggest meeting with them on the first day or going for lunch together if they'd like.
- Remember, recovery from a mental injury isn't always linear. Reassure your worker that some days or weeks may be tougher than others.



Finding duties that are right for your worker:

- Start by asking your worker what work they think they could safely do as they recover, in line with their doctor's advice.
- Focus on what they can do, while being mindful of any restrictions from their doctor.
- Speak to WorkCover if you're unsure. We can share guidance from a worker's doctor or psychologist if it directly relates to helping them get back to work.
- Talk about how you can adapt their workload or the work environment while they recover.
- Many employers will offer reduced hours or days to workers with a mental injury and build these up gradually as they recover.
- Can you reduce the complexity or pace of work? What technology or tools might help?

Suitable duties plan

Make sure there's a suitable duties plan in place for your worker outlining what work they'll do, timelines and supports.

It should have input from your worker, as well as their doctor or treatment providers.

It's important everyone agrees on the plan before starting. This helps your worker know what to expect and shows them their mental health is taken seriously.

WorkCover is here to help

If you have any questions, you can find your claim contact on WorkCover Connect and reach them directly. Or you can call one of our team on **1300 362 128**.

worksafe.qld.gov.au

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