

# Five top tips for dealing with chronic pain at work

Work is a basic part of our identity; it gives us a sense of purpose, provides financial support and friendship. However, you may encounter many obstacles to maintaining health and wellness in your work environment if you suffer from chronic pain.

Millions of people work with chronic pain. But, unfortunately, it is not easy to wake up (if you're lucky enough to have slept), struggle with intense pain and fatigue, and find the motivation and energy to work despite the pain and tiredness.

This PDF will give you some top tips to promote proactive chronic pain management in your workplace.

## 1. Learn how to communicate your pain to others effectively

Chronic pain can be challenging for others to understand and empathise with as it is often invisible. In your workplace, you have a right to confidentiality; you don't need to disclose your health status to anyone. However, there are benefits to different levels of disclosure. For example, if you let your employer know, it will allow them to make reasonable adjustments to your work. If you talk to your colleagues about your pain, they will know how and when they can support you. Think about your relationship with your employer, work goals and the culture to judge the level of disclosure you feel comfortable with.

## 2. Your physical work environment

If you haven't done so already, you should modify the way you work, as it can be a crucial element of managing your pain. It may be as simple as changing your mouse to a more ergonomic design or as detailed as a full assessment of your workplace by your employer. If you work in an office environment or from home, here are a few considerations:

- A sit to stand desk – increases movement, takes the pressure off some joints
- A good quality supportive chair – one that supports the lumbar area of your back
- An ergonomic keyboard
- A vertical mouse
- Computer screen modifications – limiting blue-light and the brightness can help with migraines
- Speech to text software

## 3. Workplace changes

If you can, have some help when you first return to work; maybe your primary healthcare provider or your employer may give you access to a return to work specialist or an occupational therapist? Whatever help you get, remember, the variety of changes that are needed and are also available may need careful assessment. In addition, the adjustments may need to be clinically assessed and justified as they are not always applicable to every business or role. Some of the workplace adjustments could include:

- Modification of hours worked – e.g. a phased return to work
- Reduced hours
- Time off for essential healthcare appointments
- Working from home
- Flexible work hours – e.g. you may have more pain in the morning and find it easier to work the afternoon and into the early evening
- Job sharing
- Regular rest breaks – good for stretching, mindfulness and fresh air

## 4. Behaviour changes

Self-care is one of the most critical behavioural changes you should make, some more simple to implement than others. Learn stretches that work for your type of pain and schedule them into your daily routine will help you to keep moving and changing positions throughout your workday. Set reminders on your phone or watch each hour. Some suggestions are desk/chair [exercises](#), getting out into the fresh air, taking a walk at lunchtime, or having a walk and talk meeting if you are able. Ensure any medication and pain self-care items are included as part of your daily work routine.

Don't forget to eat healthily and regularly, don't be tempted to skip a meal because you're too busy. Drink plenty of water. Apps are great at helping you track your wellbeing, e.g. MyFitnessPal.

Plan your workplace wellness as much in advance as you can and pace yourself. For example, if your pain is okay one day, do not overdo things and push yourself too hard. Otherwise, you will more than likely suffer the next or following few days after and end up exhausted and suffering increased pain.

## 5. Cognitive Interventions

There are many tools and techniques you can use to help the way you think about work and chronic pain. Tools such as Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), Mindfulness, Breathing, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and Meditation are just some of the ways you can help yourself to work through the pain. A [specialist coach](#) will help you learn how to use some or all of these tools when you need them most.

Distractions can help when the pain intensifies, listening to music or a podcast, do a crossword or sudoku, talk with a colleague, take a break away from your desk, even positive self-talk to remind yourself that you can get through this stage.

## And finally

Sometimes working with pain is not possible. Taking time off work to recover may be necessary; seeking help and support from professionals or learning coping strategies can all take time. This is okay; there are other ways to be productive in society other than traditional paid work. The global pandemic has shown us as a society how we can be useful and be creative. You can work from home, volunteer, mentor, crafting, teach, counsel and much more, work with your chronic pain and what you can do. Having a positive can-do attitude helps your recovery process, allowing you to move forward in your life, transforming as you go.

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