Return to work

Modified work options

To assist in the return-to-work process, an employer should develop a list of potential modified work and/or task options to consider in the event of a workplace injury and the need to develop a return-to-work plan. The modified work options should be matched to the most common injuries and the typical abilities/limitations for those injuries. The typical abilities/limitations below are guidelines to help develop a list of modified work options. These alternatives can be useful when engaging the worker to collaboratively develop a return-to-work plan in partnership with the WCB.

This document provides a list of typical limitations for common physical injuries. The list is not intended to replace specific abilities or restrictions for a worker that may be identified by the worker's health- care provider. Rather, the information is intended as a general guideline to assist an employer in developing a list of potential alternate work options.

This document provides a list of typical limitations for common physical injuries.

Neck	Shoulder	Elbow/forearm	Wrist/hand
Ensure • The worker can self-pace and/or take micro breaks. **Limit** • Activities with arms above shoulder level, including reaching down. • Activities with lifting and carrying to light or medium loads. • Hanging weights. • Ladder climbing. **Avoid** • Lifting and carrying with arms above shoulder level. • Extremes of looking up, down or over the shoulder, especially if sustained or more than a few seconds.	**Ensure** • The worker can self-pace and/or take micro breaks. **Limit** • Climbing ladders . • Activities using arm above shoulder level, including reaching down. • Activities which require lifting and carrying light or medium loads. **Avoid** • Holding the arm outstretched for periods especially while holding weights and applying force. • Lifting and carrying with arm above shoulder level.	**Ensure** • The worker can self-pace and/or take micro breaks. **Limit** • Repetitive or sustained gripping, especially where high forces are required. • Repetitive elbow ending • The total time spent keyboarding or driving. • The use of impact tools (impact power tools and hammers). **Avoid** • Hanging weights. • Forearm rotations. • Pressure on the elbow.	**Ensure** • The worker can self-pace and/or take micro breaks. **Limit** • Repetitive gripping, especially where high or sustained forces are needed. • Lifting and carrying to light or medium loads. • The total time keyboarding or driving. **Avoid** • Extreme postures of the wrist, especially with force.

Low back	Knee	Ankle
Ensure • The worker can self-pace and/or take micro breaks. • The worker can change position between walking, standing and sitting. **Limit** • Walking on uneven ground • Lifting and carrying to light or medium loads, depending on frequency and postures. **Avoid** • Jarring • Repetitive bending. • Long periods of static standing or sitting. • Extreme bending of the back.	**Ensure** • The worker can self-pace and or/ take micro breaks. • The worker can occasionally elevate the knee. • The worker can frequently change position between standing. walking and sitting. **Limit** • Walking on uneven ground **Avoid** • Long periods of standing or walking. • Deep squatting, kneeling or crouching. • Pivoting of the knee. • Participating in activities requiring bracing, balancing or running. • Stair use or ladder climbing.	**Ensure** • The worker can occasionally elevate the ankle. • The worker can self-pace and/ or take micro breaks. **Limit** • The use of stairs. **Avoid** • Long periods of standing or walking. • Walking on uneven ground • Climbing ladders. • Deep squatting or crouching. • Activities requiring balancing, bracing or running.
These typical physical limitations are guidelines to help develop an appropriate stay-at-work or return-to-work plan.		

Physical demand strength classification

The following strength classification are taken from the revised fourth edition of the Dictionary of Occupational Titles.

Physical demand strength classification	Definition	Notes
S- Sedentary work	Exerting up to 10 pounds of force occasionally and/or negligible amount of force frequently to lift, carry, push, pull or otherwise move objects, including the human body.	Sedentary work involves sitting most of the time, but may involve walking or standing for brief periods of time. Jobs are sedentary if walking and standing are required only occasionally and all other sedentary criteria are met.
L- Light work	Exerting up to 20 pounds of force occasionally, and/or up to 10 pounds of force frequently, and/or negligible amount of force constantly to move objects.	Physical demand requirements are in excess of those for sedentary work. Even though the weight lifted may be only a negligible amount, a job should be rated light work: (1) when it requires walking or standing to a significant degree, or (2) when it requires sitting most of the time but entails pushing and/or pulling of arm or leg control, and/or (3) when the job requires working at production rate pace entailing the constant pushing and/or pulling of materials even though the weight of those materials is negligible. NOTE: The constant stress and strain of maintaining a production rate pace, especially in an industrial setting, can be and is physically demanding of a worker even though the amount of force exerted is negligible.
M- Medium work	Exerting 20 to 50 pounds of force occassionally, and/or 10 to 25 pounds of force frequently, and/or greater than negligible up to 10 pounds of force constantly to move objects.	Physical demand requirements are in excess of those for light work.
H-Heavy work	Exerting 50 to 100 pounds of force occasionally, and/or 25 to 50 pounds of force frequently, and/or 10 to 20 pounds of force constantly to move objects.	Physical demand requirements are in excess of those for medium work.

V- Very heavy work	Exerting in excess of 100 pounds of force occasionally, and/or in excess of 50 pounds of force frequently, and/or in excess of 20 pounds of force constantly to move objects.	Physical demand requirements are in excess of those for heavy work.

Time/frequency descriptor:
Identifies frequency of completing tasks within a work cycle, within a workday and jobs that occur within the entire job description (for example, seasonal tasks). Although tasks may occur on a limited basis, when they are completed, the task may occur over an intensive period of time. This will be identified.

Descriptor	Definition	Example
Constant	This physical demand factor comprises 67 to 100 per cent of the work cycle or work period.	(If performing lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling, this would refer to a frequency of approximately over 30 repetitions per hour.)
Frequent	This physical demand factor comprises 34 to 66 per cent of the work cycle or work period.	(If performing lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling, this would refer to a frequency of up to approximately 30 repetitions per hour.)
Occasional	This physical demand factor comprises up to 33 per cent of the work cycle or work period.	(If performing lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling, this would refer to a frequency of up to approximately two repetitions per hour.)
Rarely	This physical demand factor comprises one to five per cent of the work cycle or work period.	(If performing lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling, this would refer to a frequency of up to approximately two repetitions per hour.)
Seldom	This physical demand factor is not a regular factor within this job.	

The frequency descriptors constant, frequent and occassional are based upon the revised fourth edition of the Dictionary of Occupatoinal Titles (DOT). The frequency descriptors Rarely and Seldom are not included in the DOT nor are the conversion of time descriptors to estimated material handling repetitions, but WCB accepts the operational definition of these terms as defined above. WCB does not mandate the use of these terms and evaluators are able to provide this information as deemed appropriate. Evaluators are encouraged to be as specific as possible and to choose a format that offers the most useful information to the reader. For example, “the lower end of the occasional frequency,” “approximately 50 per cent of the workday,” “two to four lifts per hour,” etc.

It is recommended that an employer considers all areas of the workplace when developing a list of modified work options.

Step 1: Identify the types of injuries commonly occuring in the workplace .
Step 2: For each type of injury, determine the “typical” medical abilities/restrictions.
Step 3: Ask each work area to indentify work tasks that could be done by a worker with these types of medical abilities/restrictions.
Step 4: Repeat step 3 for each type of injury.

The modified work options list should be reviewed and updated at regular intervals.

Modified work options form template

Modified work options
Type of injury
Typical medical abilities/restrictions

Work task options	
Department	**Task**
Training opportunities	
Department	**Task**