



Return to work fact sheet

Acquired brain injury (ABI) refers to damage to the brain that occurs any time after birth. The symptoms and severity of symptoms are unique to each person and can affect return to usual daily activities, including returning to work (RTW).

General guidelines:

- Workers should return to work only when most symptoms have stabilised, and physical and mental endurance can be maintained over the day (with regular refresh breaks)
- A general guide for RTW is when the person can concentrate/physically participate in activities at home for about 2 hours and/or on a computer screen for 45 minutes without the incidence of significant brain injury symptoms e.g., fatigue, headache
- Timeframes for RTW depend on the type of job and effect of brain injury symptoms.
- Workers should be medically cleared by a doctor before returning to work
- Open communication between the employer and employee is encouraged to facilitate a successful RTW

A graded return to work plan may include:

- Reduced initial hours (e.g., 3-4 hours, two to three days a week)
- Restricted/ alternative duties, reduced responsibilities, and fewer time pressures
 - Consider flexible work conditions e.g., work from home; no night shifts; quieter desk location; reduced workload
 - Allow additional time to complete tasks
 - Regular refresh breaks
- Graduated progression of hours and duties as tolerated

The following are common issues caused by an ABI. These symptoms may not be obvious or visible to the observer and can vary from mild to severe symptoms.

Common issue	Strategies
Short term memory problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write extra notes & reminders• Document discussions• Use a calendar / daily planner• Repeat information to yourself• Ask for written instructions



Common issue	Strategies
Reduced concentration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do one task at a time - avoid multitasking • Quiet environment • Alternate tasks every 30 minutes • Take regular breaks
Slower decision making and thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow extra time for tasks • Write down task steps • Talk out loud the steps • Ask for clarification when unsure • Do one task at a time. • Prioritise tasks.
Fatigue and headaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take a break before reaching your limit. • Schedule regular refresh breaks e.g., 5 minutes each hour. • Self-monitor for symptoms of fatigue • Gradually increase hours of work as tolerated • Consider the impact of non-work activities on fatigue
Impaired balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid working at heights • Seek medical guidance on at risk tasks





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