Returning to Work is a Lot of Work
Returning to Work is a Lot of Work!

There are a lot of reasons people have to take time off work. Sometimes people experience injuries or illnesses that require them to take time off to recover. Psychological or emotional issues, such as depression or anxiety, can also lead to time away from the workplace. Stress can also be a cause - whether it started in the workplace or in personal life, it can lead to time off work. No matter the cause for the time off, it can be very challenging to get back to work, and the longer people are off work the harder it is to return to work.

There are many reasons why returning to work can be difficult. Here are just a few examples of things that can get in the way:

**Physical limitations** - you may have an injury or medical condition that interferes with your functioning and will make doing your job more difficult.

**Pain** - if pain is a big part of your life, you may be worried about how you will be able to cope at work.

**Fatigue and low stamina** - whether your problems are physical or psychological or both, you may be struggling with low energy levels and feeling tired much of the time - especially if you are having trouble sleeping at night.

**Problems paying attention and concentrating** - most jobs require you to think! If you are finding that it is hard to concentrate, you may be worried about making mistakes at work.

**Problems with memory** - do you ever forget to remember? Memory problems can lead to worries about being able to do your job properly.

**Anxiety and fear** - feelings of anxiety, panic, and fear can be very consuming, and make coping with even everyday problems more difficult. These feelings often lead to people avoiding situations that increase their level of anxiety (such as going back to work!)

**Problems coping with stress** - so many things in life can cause us to feel stressed! If you feel like you fall apart when you are faced with a stressful situation, you may be very worried about how you will cope with stress in the workplace. In fact, coping with the very thought of returning to work is stressful and can seem overwhelming!

**Depressed mood and low motivation** - depression may be the reason you are off work, or it may have started since you left. Either way, symptoms of depression - like low mood, negative thinking, feeling bad about yourself, irritability, and low motivation - can make the prospect of returning to work seem impossible.

**Problems in the workplace** - If you have coworkers or supervisors that aren’t supportive or you don’t get along with, or a job that you don’t like, you may be dreading going back to work.

**Problems at home** - maybe it was a stressful situation in your personal life that led you to take off time from work in the first place, or maybe the situation at home has become
worse since you started working. Either way, it may be hard to imagine coping with a job on top of everything that is going on at home.

These sound like pretty good reasons to be off work! So why would you want to go back?

Here are a few reasons:

Money! Working means earning money, which gives people the ability to make more choices in their lives, and contributes to functioning independently in society. When people rely on insurance companies for their money, they not only feel financial strain - they also tend to feel less independent and less in control of their lives.

It beats being bored. Many people who find themselves not working for more than a few weeks start to feel bored. For some people, the more bored they get, the less motivated they feel, and they end up doing even less - leading to even more boredom and less motivation! Work provides our brains and bodies with something to do, and helps keep us sharp and active.

Work is somewhere you can do something you are good at or enjoy. If you are someone who is good at your job, you may miss the feeling that goes along with that more than you know! Working can provide feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction that are hard to find elsewhere. But it’s even more than that - work can be enjoyable! Even people who “live for Fridays” will admit that there are at least parts of their jobs that they enjoy.

Work gives our lives structure and purpose. Having structure and purpose to our day leads to increased feelings of productivity and happiness. It also contributes to positive self-identity and feelings of worth.

Earning is learning. Our brains love to be challenged. Have you ever noticed how fast time goes by when you are really engaged in an activity? Work often provides a place for us to be challenged, find solutions and solve problems, learn, and grow.

Social life. Who said our social life happens after work? Many people have great relationships with their coworkers. When not at work, people tend to feel more isolated and lonely.

So - work is important for happiness, feelings of productivity, self-worth, feeling in control of your life, social relationships, financial security - the list goes on. The truth is, work is a very important part of living.

You may feel like you are in a game of tug of war - even though going back to work has lots of benefits, given the problems that you are facing, getting back to work may seem like a daunting task indeed.
The first step is to look at what is getting in your way of going back to work.

*What are the physical problems you are facing?*

*What are the emotional problems you are facing?*

*Are you worried about how you will perform or cope at work? If so, what are your concerns?*

*Is there anything about your work situation – maybe something about your job, workplace, co-workers, or supervisors - that makes you reluctant to go back?*
Are you facing stressful situations in your personal life that interfere with getting back to work?

Your list of roadblocks may be short or it may be long - but chances are, it will make you wonder how you are going to get around the problems and successfully make it back to work.

Let’s change gears and look at reasons why it would be good - or even great - to get back to work.

*What are the good things about working?*

*What do you enjoy about your job?*
What is the best part of your job?

Describe what a really good day at work was like

Is there anything you miss about working in general, or about your job in particular?

What is missing from your life when you aren’t working?
What would be the best part about being back at work?

It is time to start preparing for going back to work. Even though you know there are so many important and positive things about working, this is a scary process for almost everyone who has been off work for some time. Think about it - some people get nervous about going back to work after a vacation! No wonder it is so anxiety-provoking to go back after you’ve been off because of health, mental health, or other problems. The good news is that there is a lot you can do to prepare yourself for the transition back into working life - and that this process will be worth it in the end.

The following pages provide additional worksheets to help you to prepare and plan for returning to work.
‘Pros’ and ‘Cons’ of Returning To Work

As you think about return to work, it can be helpful to summarize the pros and cons in the following table.

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<th>Pros of Returning to Work</th>
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Obstacles and Solutions

Another helpful strategy in the preparation process is to list the obstacles and challenges that are getting in the way of returning to work. You can do this in the first column in the table below. In the second column, try to brainstorm possible solutions. In the last column, try to identify an action plan - outlining the specific steps in how you could actually implement the solution.

<table>
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<th>Obstacles or Challenges</th>
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*Back in Motion Rehab Inc.*