

**Healthy
Working
Life**

**West Yorkshire
Health and Care Partnership**



Long-term conditions in the workplace



**A guide for employees
and employers**

April 2026

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Designed in partnership with the
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Long-term conditions in the workplace

This guide has been designed by the Bradford District and Craven Multi-system Rehabilitation Service in partnership with the University of Aberdeen Business School and NHS West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board.

If you have any questions about it, you can email Professor Alexandros Zangelidis - a.zangelidis@abdn.ac.uk or Professor Catia Montagna - c.montagna@abdn.ac.uk at the business school. Organisations are welcome to use and adapt this guide to suit local needs. We kindly ask that you reference us by using the following statement.

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Find out more at [Healthy Working Life : West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership](#).



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About this guide

Sometimes, long-term health condition symptoms can make work and home life harder.

This guide has been designed to help people who have long-term conditions and the people they work for.

If you have a long-term condition, some jobs at work might feel harder for you than for other people. This is not anyone's fault. Everyone has the right to get support at work.



Supporting people at work is not about giving some people 'special treatment'. It is about making sure everyone has the best chance to do well at their job. This guide aims to help people succeed at work. We hope it will empower employees and employers to talk more openly, without fear.

This guide supports employees and employers by:

- helping everyone learn about long-term conditions
- explaining the symptoms people might have and what might be hard for them
- raising awareness of the Equality Act and what 'reasonable adjustments' mean
- giving managers guidance around having clear and helpful chats with employees
- giving employees simple ways to track their symptoms and notice how their health affects their work
- sharing simple ideas to make work easier for people
- helping everyone think about health at work

Awareness for employees and employers

What is a long-term condition?

A long-term condition is an illness that cannot be cured. The illness may be controlled by medicines and other care. Long-term conditions need management over many years.

([Rough et al 2025](#))

Long-term conditions are very common and there are many different long-term conditions. They include diseases that cannot be passed from one person to another. Examples include stroke, heart and circulatory diseases, lung diseases, diabetes, mental health problems and arthritis. They can also include illnesses that can be passed between people, such as Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

People can often have more than one long-term condition. ([Rough et al 2025](#))

Facts

In 2019, almost 1 in 6 people were living with a major illness. ([Watt et al 2023](#))

It is thought that 14.8% of people in England live with two or more long-term conditions. ([Valabhji et al 2023](#))

Over 8 million people in the UK aged 16 to 64 report they have a long-term condition that limits them in work. ([Health Foundation 2023](#))

In the UK, the number of days lost to sickness for people with a long-term condition is 104.9 million days per year. ([Office for National Statistics 2022](#))

When an employee who earns £25,000 or more leaves their job, it costs a business about £30,614 to replace them. Most of this money is lost because a new employee needs time to learn the job (£25,181). The rest (£5,433) is spent on finding and training the new person. ([Oxford Economics 2023](#))

These facts show us why it is important to keep people healthy in work.

Symptoms

There are many different symptoms of long-term conditions. A person's symptoms are individual to them. Symptoms can happen all the time or come and go. Sometimes symptoms can change and get worse. The same symptoms can affect people differently. Common symptoms include feeling very tired (fatigue), pain, struggling to concentrate, sleep problems and feeling worried or sad.

A person's symptoms can be affected by their workplace and the tasks they do. They can also be affected by diet, exercise, sleep, medications and things like the weather and travel.

Everyone's experience is different. Sometimes symptoms are found together in groups.



Physical symptoms

Physical symptoms can affect the whole body, or parts of the body. They include things like:

- fatigue (feeling very tired, even after resting)
- poor sleep
- headaches
- being sensitive to temperature changes
- difficulty moving around
- pain in muscles or joints
- difficulty breathing

Non-physical symptoms

Non-physical symptoms affect emotions and how the brain works but don't have an obvious physical cause. They include things like:

- feeling very sad or worried
- finding it hard to concentrate
- forgetting things easily

How symptoms can cause difficulties

Sometimes, symptoms make work and home life harder. This is not anyone's fault. Below are some of examples of how someone's work may be affected.

Physical symptoms like feeling very tired can make it hard to focus. It might be tricky to finish jobs, make choices quickly or remember things. People with physical symptoms like muscle or joint pain may find lifting, moving or sitting at a desk more difficult. Physical symptoms can also make travel harder.

Non-physical symptoms like feeling very sad or forgetting things easily can affect friendships and family. They can also make it hard to stay motivated, concentrate for long periods and get involved at work.

Having a workplace that encourages colleagues to be kind and support each other can make work less difficult. It can also make life outside of work better for people living with long-term conditions.



Supporting employees' health and wellbeing and the law

Supporting the health and wellbeing of employees doesn't just benefit them, it creates positive working environments where individuals and the organisations they work for can do well. Things like workplace adjustments and flexible working help everyone, especially people with long-term conditions.



This focus on health and wellbeing for all employees is supported by the Equality Act 2010 which protects people with disabilities. Some people with long-term health conditions might not think they are disabled, but the law has a clear definition. A person is considered disabled under the law if their symptoms make daily tasks harder for at least 12 months and this has a big effect on their life. If this applies to an employee, they are protected under the Equality Act, even if they haven't been diagnosed with a long-term condition.

To help protect people with disabilities, the Equality Act asks employers to make reasonable adjustments to help people at work.

What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are changes to a job or a workplace task to make work easier. These can be big changes or small changes depending on the employee's needs. The reasonable adjustments someone needs will depend on their symptoms. It will also depend on where they work and what their job is.

Employers are expected to make reasonable adjustments when:

- they know someone is living with a disability
- an employee or job applicant living with a disability asks for adjustments
- someone who lives with a disability is finding part of their job difficult
- a person's sickness, time off or delay in returning into work is because of their disability

What does 'reasonable' mean?

It depends on the situation. Employers need to think about whether the change is:

- possible to do
- within the allowed budget
- safe for other employees
- helpful in making the employee's job easier

Occupational Health

Managers can often get extra help or information from their workplace.

Some workplaces have their own Occupational Health team, others use an outside service. Occupational Health helps people stay well at work.

A manager might use Occupational Health to help when:

- an employee is having trouble with their physical or mental health
- they need to make reasonable adjustments
- an employee has been off sick or is returning to work
- they want to help employees stay well in work
- they want to stop problems that can harm mental health - this includes things like too much pressure on an employee, bullying or harassment



Reasonable adjustments

The reasonable adjustments an employee needs will depend on their symptoms. You can find more information about the different symptoms of long-term conditions on the [Symptoms page](#).

Reasonable adjustments at work can help people do their job more easily. Reasonable adjustments should always be discussed before any changes are made to the workplace. This should happen in a one-to-one meeting between the employee and their manager. An employee can bring someone with them to a one-to-one meeting if they want to. This could be a supportive colleague or a union representative.



If someone has physical symptoms, adjustments that may help could include:

- taking regular rest breaks
- working more flexibly, for example starting later or working from home
- changing the workspace, such as having a quieter, cooler, warmer or darker area
- a manager understanding that the employee's performance might change each day, depending on symptoms
- new or special equipment to make working easier
- reducing how much someone needs to walk - working on the ground floor or near the toilets for example
- making travel easier, such as giving a car parking space close to the entrance
- changing duties if some tasks are too hard - some employees may find it difficult to stand or talk for too long
- sitting down when possible or working with others on physical tasks

If someone has non-physical symptoms, adjustments that may help are:

- choosing the best way to communicate for that person, like email or face-to-face
- the employee having daily time to plan their own day so they can work around their symptoms
- changing or reducing some work tasks for a while
- having regular check-ins between the employee and their manager – this is where an employee can talk about how they are feeling or managing
- enabling an employee to do things to help their mood in work time
- quiet, uninterrupted working time
- extra time to finish tasks and ask questions

Below are some other reasonable adjustments.

Employees should try to book medical appointments outside work time. If they can't, their manager should still let them go during work's time.

Important medicine must be easy to reach.

Managers should support employees to use strategies that help them manage their symptoms.

If the employee agrees, it can help for colleagues to know about some of the changes in place. This can help with wider support in the workplace.

A referral to Occupational Health if available.

A workspace assessment. This is when someone checks the workspace. They might suggest changes that could make work easier.

Absence triggers may be changed to help support with a long-term condition. Managers may ask Occupational Health for advice.

If an employee needs support

When an employee is having difficulties in work because of their long-term condition, they should tell their manager they need support. A time and place should be set for a one-to-one meeting to talk about this.

In this meeting, a support action plan should be agreed and recorded together. This is a simple document that can be used to put new reasonable adjustments in place. A reasonable adjustment may include a referral to Occupational Health for further support. It should be agreed how often the plan needs to be reviewed. This may need to be long term.

This is what usually happens when someone with a long-term condition needs support at work, but not all employers are the same. Different employers will have different processes around supporting employees with long-term conditions. Employers are encouraged to make all employees aware of any relevant policies they have. This could include a return-to-work policy or a flexible working policy for example.



Where to find more information and support

It is important to get information from places you can trust. This includes NHS websites and charities that help people with long-term health conditions.

NHS information pages

A to Z guide of conditions. Find out about health conditions, including their symptoms and how they are treated.

[Conditions A to Z - NHS](#)

Independent Age

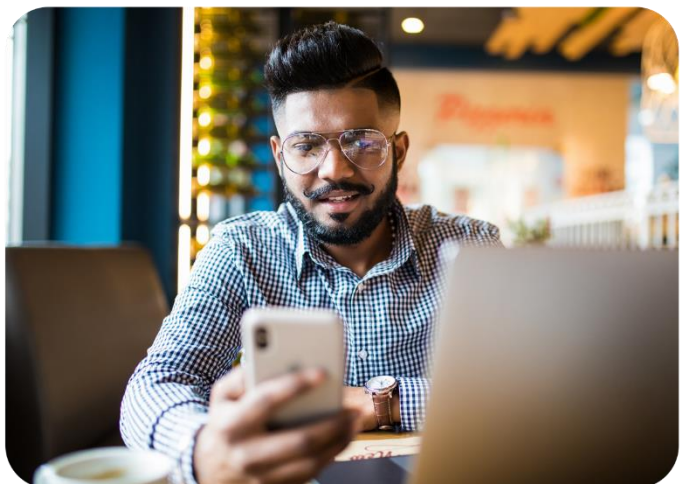
Independent Age is a national charity. It has good advice on long-term conditions and some links to common condition specific charities.

[Where to get support with a long-term condition | Independent Age](#)

Acas

A service that works to improve workplace relationships.

[What reasonable adjustments are - Reasonable adjustments at work - Acas](#)



Guidance for managers

Common long-term condition symptoms

Long-term health problems can cause lots of different symptoms, and everyone feels them in their own way.

These symptoms might affect the whole body, how someone thinks or feels, or how their body works. You can find more information about the different symptoms of long-term conditions on the [Symptoms page](#).

If you're the manager of a person with a long-term condition, it's important to learn about the symptoms they have, not just the symptoms you expect.

Each symptom can make it harder for an employee to do their job. You or the employee can suggest changes to help them.

It is important to listen to the employee when they talk about their symptoms and how these affect them every day.

There are many long-term conditions. Examples are diabetes, arthritis, high blood pressure, epilepsy, asthma and mental health conditions.

Not every long-term condition means an employee needs changes to their job. Changes are only needed if symptoms make working harder.



How to offer support

You can support **everyone** in the workplace by making sure people feel okay talking about their health. To do this, you can:

- have regular and open one-to-one chats to check how people are doing at work and with their health
- watch for changes in work or attendance and offer help if needed
- be ready to give support like flexible hours or changes to people's workspaces
- learn about long-term conditions and how they can affect people
- find out where extra information and help is available so you can share details with employees
- challenge and stop unkind comments or behaviours
- listen kindly and without judging, because everyone's experience is different

If someone has physical symptoms, support that may help could include:

- checking how much energy they have and how much work they can do
- helping them choose which tasks to do first
- talking about flare-ups (when symptoms get worse) and giving short-term changes when needed
- setting up a workplace assessment
- encouraging regular movement or stretching
- talking about giving short-term changes in tasks if they are in pain

If someone has non-physical symptoms, support that may help could include:

- giving clear plans, expectations and deadlines
- writing down the main points after a chat and sharing them with the employee
- being clear about which tasks are most important
- avoiding last minute urgent jobs
- telling them early if something is going to change in the future
- having kind, regular check-ins

Checklist for a one-to-one meeting

All reasonable adjustments need to be discussed in a one-to-one meeting before they are put into place. You can find more information about reasonable adjustments on the [Reasonable adjustments page](#).

Here is a checklist of things to consider in one-to one meetings.

Before the meeting

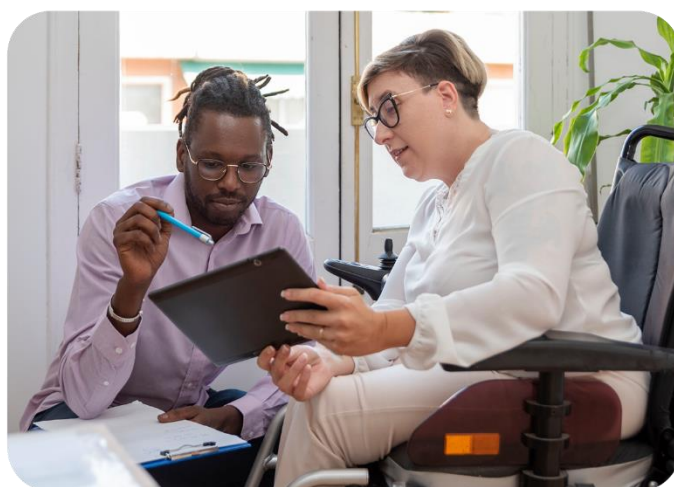
1. Look at any health details or work problems the person has shared before.
2. Learn about common long-term condition symptoms and how they might affect work. Remind yourself about the symptoms of long-term conditions by going to the [Symptoms page](#).
3. Check your workplace policies for any guidance or rules on reasonable adjustments and support.
4. Choose a good time for the one-to-one meeting that works for both of you.
5. Make sure there is a quiet, private place for the meeting where you won't be disturbed.
6. Make a simple plan for what to talk about. [You'll find an example of an agenda for a one-to-one meeting on this page](#).
7. Allow enough time at the meeting to understand what the employee needs and to think about possible solutions.
8. Ask the employee if they are bringing someone to the meeting with them for support, such as a union representative or a colleague.

During the meeting

1. Start by letting the employee know you care.
2. Assure the employee you will keep things private, and that you want to help.
3. Ask questions that let them explain their feelings and needs.
4. Ask about how their symptoms might affect their work and wellbeing.
5. Work together to find changes and reasonable adjustments that will help them.
Remind yourself about reasonable adjustments by going to the [Reasonable adjustments page](#).
6. Write down what you agreed and times when things will be done by using a support action plan. [There is an example of a support action plan on this page](#).
7. Plan follow-up meetings to check what is working and learn about any new problems.

After the meeting

1. Share the support action plan with the employee.
2. Carry out actions to make reasonable adjustments happen.
3. Check in often to see if more help is needed.
4. Make sure your workplace is kind and fair.



Agenda for a one-to-one meeting

Use this agenda to help guide your meeting about reasonable adjustments and the support you can give as a manager.

Meeting aim

The aim is to understand what the employee needs and what worries they have about their symptoms at work. You will work together to make a plan that helps them do their best in their job.

At the meeting there will be:

- the employee
- a union representative or colleague (if the employee wants someone there for support)
- yourself, as the employee's manager, or someone from Human Resources

Be flexible with the length of the meeting to give plenty of time to talk.

Six steps that can help at a one-to-one meeting

1. Start by reassuring

Say that you want to help the employee manage their health and work. Reassure them that what you talk about will stay private. For example, "This meeting is to understand your needs and make changes to support you. Everything we talk about is private."



2. Learn about their experience of having a long-term condition

Ask simple questions so the employee can share how their long-term condition affects them. Below are some examples of questions you could ask.

How does your long-term condition affect you each day?
What problems have you had at work because of your condition?
Are some tasks or times of day harder for you?
What symptoms make work difficult?
What is the biggest challenge for you at work?
What help would be most useful for you?

3. Talk about possible changes or reasonable adjustments

Discuss what changes or reasonable adjustments at work could help, based on their symptoms and challenges. Remind yourself about the symptoms of long-term conditions by going to the [Symptoms page](#). You can find more information about reasonable adjustments on the [Reasonable adjustments page](#).

4. Make a support action plan

Work together to write down the changes and support agreed. Set clear times for when changes will start and when you will check how they are working. [There is an example of a support action plan on this page](#).

5. Keep talking and share resources

Encourage the employee to give feedback about the changes. Share helpful resources like:

- internal help (for example Human Resources, Occupational Health)
- external help (including NHS, charities and support groups) - some helpful resources can be found on the [‘Where to find information and support’ page](#).
- self-help (such as stress tips and healthy lifestyle advice) – [there’s information for employees about staying well in work on this page](#).

6. End the meeting and plan a follow-up

Summarise what you agreed. Arrange another meeting to check if the support action plan is working and to make changes if needed.

Support action plan

A support action plan is a simple document that managers and employees can use to put new reasonable adjustments in place. It can also include a phased return-to-work plan, if the employee will be returning to work in stages.

You can use the following as a guide during a one-to-one meeting where you can complete the employee's support action plan together. Adapt it for your employee's individual support needs and use the [reasonable adjustments section](#) to help you. You should both keep a copy of the plan so you both know what changes will happen in the short and long term.

Suggestions for your support action plan

1. List any short-term adjustments (up to weeks).
2. List any long-term adjustments (up to weeks).
3. List any actions you (as the manager) will take following the meeting.
4. List any actions the employee will take following the meeting.
5. Agree a date to meet again and review these adjustments.



Returning to work

When an employee has been off work for a period of time, it can be hard to know how to help them come back in a healthy way. This guide can help you develop a return-to-work plan with the employee.

Phased return-to-work plan

One option when coming back to work is a phased return. This means the employee starts with fewer hours and fewer responsibilities. Some employers may not have policies that provide pay for a phased return. In such cases, it may still be possible for the employee to have a phased return but with reduced pay until the return period has been completed. If this is not suitable for the employee, there are other ways they can be supported when they return to work. See the next page for information about flexible working.

If a phased-return is an option, the employee should plan to slowly increase their working hours over time. Many workplaces have a return-to-work policy. These can often be strict and may not suit everyone. Occupational Health and Human Resources may be able to support an employee to extend a phased return if needed.

A typical phased return over four weeks may look like:

- Week 1 – 25% of usual hours
- Week 2 – 50% of usual hours
- Week 3 – 75% of usual hours
- Week 4 – 100% of usual hours

The four-week plan above may work for some people. However, people with long-term conditions often require a longer and more gradual return. This could look like:

- Week 1 – 10% of normal hours
- Week 2 – 25% of normal hours
- Week 3 – 35% of normal hours
- Week 4 – 50% of normal hours
- Week 5 – 60% of normal hours
- Week 6 – 75% of normal hours
- Week 7 – 100% of normal hours

A phased return is not just about working fewer hours. It also means slowly taking on more responsibilities. When the employee first comes back, they might start by doing only one part of their job. Each week they can take on a bit more.

Tips for a successful phased return

Every phased return will be different. These tips can help the employee feel more supported.

Spread working days across the week so they have time to rest between work days.

Have regular check-ins to see how things are going.

It is not recommended to increase both the number of days and the hours each day in the same week.

Agree the return-to-work plan before the employee returns to work so they know what to expect.

Be flexible - coming back to work can be hard. The plan may need to pause or change depending on the employee's symptoms.

Have a clear list of tasks for the employee each week. Show how these will slowly increase over time.

Flexible working

Flexible working arrangements can also help employees manage their symptoms while staying productive. This might include adjusting start and finish times, working from home for part of the week, shorter shifts or rearranging tasks to suit energy levels throughout the day. There's more [information about flexible working on the GOV.UK website](#).



Creating a supportive work environment

In a good work environment people feel safe. They know where to go to get support. They find it easy to talk about any problems they have. This safety helps people stay healthy and do their jobs well. A good work environment helps everyone, not just people with long-term conditions.

A good, supportive workplace might:

- have a quiet space away from the workspace for breaks
- have a comfortable workspace - this could mean somewhere that is the right temperature, with access to windows or fans for example
- encourage employees to build supportive relationships in the workplace
- have regular chances for people to share problems with managers (anonymous options are even better)
- have a kitchen to store food and make drinks
- be somewhere that promotes healthy habits like taking screen or movement breaks
- have clear, friendly policies everyone can access

Managers must remember things outside of work can affect how someone feels at work. People could be affected by:

- stress
- poor food
- a lack of movement or activity
- poor sleep
- an illness
- the weather
- their journey to and from work
- changes in medication



A supportive workplace listens to employees. It checks in often and is willing to change plans to support their wellbeing.

Guidance for employees

Staying well in work

One of your manager's jobs is to look after everyone at work.

To understand your needs better, your manager may arrange a one-to-one meeting with you. They should listen to you to better understand your symptoms and discuss what changes could support you.



There are lots of small things you can do to help yourself stay well in work. These could be short-term changes for when your symptoms are worse. They could be long-term changes to help prevent symptoms completely.

Be open about your long-term condition by:

- talking to your healthcare professional about any health changes you might be worried about
- being honest with your manager
- going to your manager as soon as possible with any questions or issues
- telling your manager if your health condition has changed and if you need anything different

Make work better for you by:

- improving your workspace so it is arranged to suit your needs
- adjusting the temperature and lighting
- taking regular breaks throughout the day if your job allows you to do this and especially if you work on a screen
- having ways to stay as organised as you can - this can help to reduce stress

Look after yourself by:

- prioritising your treatment and wellbeing
- eating a balanced diet and having regular meals
- making sure you have enough sleep and that it's good quality sleep
- drinking plenty of water
- having a healthy work life balance
- moving or doing some regular physical activity
- keeping track of your symptoms regularly

Connect with others by:

- joining a patient support group in your area
- finding out what resources are offered by related charities or organisations

More information about staying well in work

NHS information pages

The NHS Self Help web page has tips, guides, tools and activities to support and improve mental health.

[NHS Self Help](#)

Independent Age

This charity has a helpful list of long-term condition charities to contact, as well as links to services that offer emotional support.

[Where to get support with a long-term condition | Independent Age](#)

Symptom tracker

By tracking your symptoms, you can help your manager understand how your symptoms affect you. Your symptom tracker can be given to your manager before a meeting to discuss adjustments in the workplace.

Below are a few steps you could include in your symptom tracker but it's important that it works for you. It's okay to come up with your own symptom tracker in a format that suits you and your work.

List each symptom you have and say how it affects you by giving it a rating from 1 to 3 as follows:

1 = It bothers you a little

2 = It bothers you a medium amount

3 = It bothers you a lot

You can write more about what you feel. You can also say if something seemed to cause the symptom. Make sure you add the date so you can look back and see if things are getting better or worse over time.



Long-term conditions questions and answers

Talking about your long-term condition can feel hard but your manager is there to support you.

If you don't talk to them, they will not know how your symptoms affect your work. They might not be aware you need help. It is important to meet with your manager to tell them.

It's a good idea to prepare a list of questions and answers before your one-to-one meeting. Below are some questions to think about. Having answers to all or some of these questions will help you think about what you want to say before your meeting.



What symptoms do you have?

How do these symptoms affect your daily life at work?

How do these symptoms affect your daily life outside work?

Do you know what policies exist at work to support you?

What support or reasonable adjustments do you already have in work, and do they help?

Are there any other reasonable adjustments you think you need?

Are there changes you could make to help yourself in and out of work?

Are there any worries or questions you want to talk about with your manager?

Other support available

Your manager is there to support you and your wellbeing in work. There are also many services that can support people to thrive at work. Here are some of those services.

Trade Union support

If you are a member of a trade union, you might want to contact them. Union stewards can offer advice and can help you if you need to raise an issue at work. They can support you in a one-to-one meeting with your manager. A union may also help you get legal advice and support.

[Join a union | TUC](#)

Access to Work

Access to Work is government work support programme. It aims to help disabled people start or stay in work.

[Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition: What Access to Work is - GOV.UK](#)

Citizens Advice

For general advice and links to further information.

[Citizens Advice](#)

The Equality Act

It might be helpful to learn more about the Equality Act.

[Disability rights and the Equality Act 2010 - GOV.UK](#)

Health and wellbeing passports and staff networks

If your employer has a health and wellbeing passport scheme, this might be something that can support you at work. Many organisations also have staff networks specifically for people with long-term conditions. If you're unsure, ask your manager if your workplace has these types of support in place.

Checklist for your one-to-one meeting

Before the meeting

1. Think about your symptoms. How do they affect your work? Creating a symptom tracker might help. [See this guidance on creating a symptom tracker](#).
2. Write down your challenges and the reasonable adjustments that could help. Remind yourself about reasonable adjustments by going to the [Reasonable adjustments page](#).
3. Ask a union representative or supportive colleague to attend the meeting with you if this would help you.

During the meeting

1. Be honest and open and explain how your condition affects your work.
2. It's a good idea to have a list of questions and answers you can refer to at your meeting. See the ['Long-term conditions questions and answers' page](#) for some possible questions that can help you prepare for your meeting.
3. Ask about help and reasonable adjustments. Ask about changes, support and policies that could help you.
4. Make a support action plan with your manager. Agree on changes and reasonable adjustments. [You'll find guidance for developing a support action plan here](#).
5. Take notes for your own records.

After the meeting

1. Wait for your manager to share the support action plan with you. This has the changes and support agreed.
2. Keep reviewing the reasonable adjustments to see if the support helps you.
3. Keep talking and tell your manager about any new problems or changes you need.

If things aren't going to plan

Often the changes agreed help employees manage better in the workplace. However, sometimes more changes are needed. If this is the case for you, here are some things you can do.

Speak with your manager first to discuss your challenges. See if you can problem solve these together.

Ask for a referral to Occupational Health or to speak to Human Resources. They may be able to offer more support.

Speak to your healthcare professional who may be able to offer further support for your long-term condition. They may help you to access work rehabilitation if it is available in your area.

Your healthcare professional may support you with some time off work. This may help you to recover from any worsened symptoms.

Sometimes, talking with your manager may not fix the problem. This can be very upsetting. [Acas](#) can give you clear advice about your rights at work. They can help you fix problems at work.



References

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