



Bradford District & Craven

**MULTI-SYSTEM
REHABILITATION
SERVICE**

STROKE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

.....

SELF MANAGEMENT PACK

.....



anhsft.vocationalrehabpathway@nhs.net

West Yorkshire
Health and Care Partnership

NHS

Airedale
NHS Foundation Trust

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1. Before you return to work

1.1.1 Physical

What is activity tolerance

How each person reacts to activity is different, and how it impacts you can reflect your **current activity tolerance**. Consider your:

Rating of perceived exertion

1

Very Light Activity

Anything other than complete rest

2-3

Light Activity

Can maintain for hours, easy to do

4-5

Moderate Activity

Can exercise for long periods of time

6-7

Vigorous Activity

On verge of becoming uncomfortable

8-9

Very Hard Activity

Difficult to maintain the intensity

10

Max Effort

Feels impossible to continue, completely out of breath

Find a level (measured by intensity, duration, and frequency) you are comfortable doing regularly. **This is your baseline.**

For example, doing some light exercise daily can be good for your physical and mental wellbeing. Gradually build up how much you do e.g., 1 walk a week to 3 walks a week, over 3 weeks.

To build activity tolerance, increase either:

- Frequency
- Duration
- Intensity

! Not all at once

1.1.2

Physical

Using daily tasks to build your activity tolerance



Building activity tolerance may include:

Completing your normal routine e.g., waking up, getting washed and dressed, and having breakfast, to be ready for your normal work start time

Simulating work activities or demands and home e.g. computer-time for an office-based role; standing for a longer time in labouring/retail-based roles.

If you **commute to work**, practise this and consider how tiring this is. Do you need to adjust this before returning to work?

Consider whether **part-time volunteering** is an option to slowly prepare yourself for a working environment, with less pressure



Building a routine

A **phone battery** is a useful way to visualise how energy is used. Each day starts with a full battery. This represents our energy. Every activity, from getting out of bed to cooking dinner, may use up energy. After brain injury, the battery may not be able to hold as much charge and it may run out faster. We must carefully plan and prioritize tasks so as to not run out of energy. Charging an empty battery takes much longer than topping one up. This can be helpful when explaining fatigue to others.



1.2

Psychological

Recognising what you need, so you know what to ask for



Life after brain injury can impact our mindset as your brain is still recovering. This might look like changes in our **mood, self-worth, and sense of belonging**.

Managing and controlling emotions may become more difficult, or your motivation or desires might have changed.

Changes in feelings (e.g., tired/irritable), **thoughts** (can I do this?), **physical sensations** (butterflies in stomach) and **behaviours** (withdrawing from social events) may suggest you have an unmet need.

Awareness of an unmet need is a first step in taking time for self-care, looking after your mental health (mindfulness) and asking for support (e.g., family/friends/professional).

Self care is important in managing your energy levels as you increase your day-to-day tasks. It can include:

- **Physical** - Warm soak in the bath, exercising, resting
- **Social** - spending time alone or meeting with friends
- **Hobbies** - Reading, drawing, gardening, music
- **Emotional** - journaling, going to therapy
- **Spiritual** - praying, attending services, meditation



1.2.2

Psychological

Practicing mindfulness



Mindfulness - focusing on the present, by paying attention to your mind, body, or surroundings and can help support your brain function and energy levels.

Mindfulness techniques to use in your daily routine:

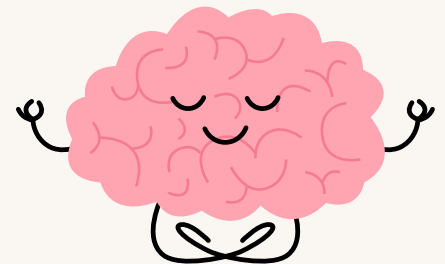
- **Mindful breathing** - focusing on your breath as it flows in and out, helping to anchor your mind and reduce stress.
- **Body scanning** - mentally scan your body from head to toe, noticing how each part feels without judgment.
- **Mindful walking** - pay close attention to the sensations of walking, such as the feel of the ground under your feet and the rhythm of your steps.
- **Practicing gratitude** - reflecting on things you are thankful for can shift your focus to positive experiences
- **Mindful eating** - Pay attention to to taste, sight, sensation of what you eat.



Mindfulness Apps and websites:

- Calm
- Headspace
- The mindfulness app
- 3-minute mindfulness
- Smiling mind
- Mindful.org
- Freemindfulness.org

Plus many more...



1.3.1

Cognitive

Use activity to challenge your thinking skills

Some common cognitive difficulties after Stroke or Brain Injury:

- Issues with **concentrating** for long without distraction
- Changes in **thinking skills** e.g., planning how to carry out familiar tasks
- Problems **processing** different forms of information (e.g., pictures/spoken instruction)
- Issues **remembering** important events (e.g., birthdays, appointments)
- Not being able to shift between tasks or divide attention between more than one task (e.g., **multi-tasking**)

Play individual and multiplayer games, this helps your brain make **new connections** to regain function after injury.

Try specific **brain training** such as memory tests and online exercises.



You can challenge your brain using **puzzles and games** you are familiar with. They can help with:

- ✚ Strategic thinking and problem solving
- ✚ Memory and concentration
- ✚ Stress-free activities and mood boosters
- ✚ Working with others
- ✚ Hand-eye coordination and motor skills

Games to help with recovery:

- Card games
- Video/phone games
- Jigsaw puzzles
- Sudoku
- Board games
- Crosswords
- Trivia

1.3.2

Cognitive

Planning your return



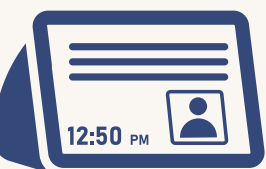
Visualise your working day

Did you think of any issues you could prepare for? Do you need any help with these issues?

Arrange your environment to make it more accessible for the day e.g., lay out work clothes the night before, put work bag by the door, keep items such as cleaning supplies upstairs and down stairs to avoid having to carry them between floors.

Incorporate tasks that align with your work role

such as typing practice, writing tasks, simulating games, maths equations etc.



Use smart devices e.g. Alexa/Siri for alarms and reminders to help you remember tasks. Smart devices can also be helpful to monitor progress in physical or cognitive activities, track fatigue levels, and increase motivation.

What tasks are important to you?

Could you **reduce/defer** any tasks to help you manage your fatigue levels when you return to work? For example, when cooking consider meal prep/healthier ready meals.

Can you spend **more time** on other tasks that are **not time critical**?
Can it be **spread out** over a longer period?



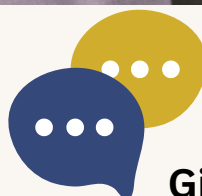
1.4.1

Social

Identifying supportive people and how they can help



Managing Relationships



Keep **communication** as honest and open as possible.

Keep in touch with your employer, make sure they are aware of your situation and plan (Check your **sickness policies**).

Talk with your family/friends about ongoing symptoms and how they affect you e.g., fatigue. **Be honest** about what you may be finding difficult.

Discuss how your family/friends can **support** your return to work. Agree who will support and what tasks you need help with e.g. temporarily reducing home responsibilities.

Give clear examples of an event, how it made you feel, and what your needs are.

e.g., “Walking around the supermarket physically drained me, I need some time to rest”.



Hidden Symptoms, like fatigue, are not always understood by those that do not experience it. Your employer may not understand strokes or how to support you as every stroke is different. Your symptoms are specific to you - sometimes your experience needs to be clearly explained.

*There are resources explaining the hidden (& non-hidden) symptoms on the Stroke association website (See resources). It may be useful to share these with your employer/colleagues if you feel comfortable doing so

1.4.2

Social

Understand and manage your social battery

Social Life

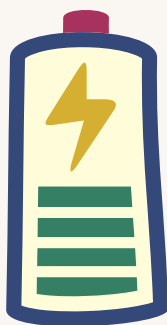


Socialising, or being with other people, can be really demanding and overstimulating, even before a brain injury.

Our social engagement system, which picks up and processes signals from other people (body language, tone, facial expressions), requires lots of energy.

- Try to slowly **build up the number of social engagements** you attend.

Our brains are processing lots of information about the people we are seeing, and the environments we are in. This can make socialising with new or familiar people very tiring - **Listen to your body**



- Consider **how different environments make you feel now**.

Do you need **more quiet space** as it is difficult to block out noise?
Do you need lots of people around to **energise you** and keep you motivated?

- Try to identify your **triggers** (things that cause negative emotions) and **glimmers** (things that bring you joy) for socialising - start developing **healthy coping strategies**.

2. Practical Tips



- Pre-prepare meals or incorporate some healthy ready meals
- Schedule agreed rest time (with family/ employer) before and after work
- Making self-care a priority to balance the demands of your working day.
- Be aware of stress and have effective strategies to manage difficult thoughts and feelings.
- Have a trusted person you can confide in about the worries you might be having about returning to work.
- Access to a support group to share concerns and seek advice from people with similar experiences
- Have an achievable routine for drinking (maintain good fluid intake) in your workplace. Can you take a large bottle to your workstation?
- Understand your medication and how this will fit into your working day. Have you noticed side effects which impact your daily performance? Seek medical advice if you are concerned.
- Be kind to yourself. Recovery is a long process that will continue over months or years.

You are not alone in your return to work. There are services which will support you (see resources).

3. When you return to work

3.1 Making the plan

Remember, a return to work conversation is about your needs

Try to **ensure your voice is heard**, this may be difficult but is often easier with support. If needed, take someone you trust who can help manage difficult conversations with your employer.

You may need to reduce your workload initially

Discuss with your employer how this transition will be managed. Consider:

- **A phased return** (same job, but reduced hours over an agreed period: few months)
- **Altered/reduced responsibilities** (same job, but some duties are delegate to other members over an agreed period).
- **Adaptations to environment/working equipment** (display screen equipment assessment for office-space positioning/posture).
- **Discuss whether working from home or hybrid working is an option** to reduce the commute/increase time in the morning



Only give your employer the facts they need, when they need/ask for them.

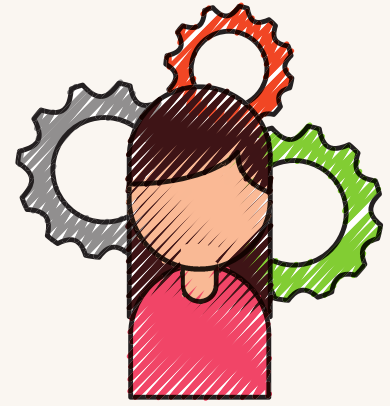
Do not feel pressured into tackling a workload you do not feel ready for. **There is likely a solution to support you.**

There should not be an expectation to immediately manage the same responsibilities on your return to work after a major health event

When you plan to return to work, try not to plan other important events during this time.

You will need to time to adjust to the increased demands work will bring.

3.2 What should a return to work look like?



Examples of a supportive and less supportive return to work

Least supportive return to work

Minimal discussion with your managers

Expected back at full duties straight away

Straight back to previous working hours

No AHP report or consideration of your needs

No reasonable adjustments

No consideration of changes you may need to make at home

No support from your workplace

Typical return to work

Discuss with your managers at the start of your return

Start with small tasks and build up as time goes on

Standard phase back to usual working hours

Your needs expressed in an AHP report

Reasonable adjustments in a verbal agreement with your direct manager

Support system ready to help when needed

Some advice followed by work, no access to personal support

Most supportive return with the Vocational Rehab Team

Supported to discuss needs with your managers in advance

A detailed plan of how to increase your duties tailored to your needs

An individualised plan to work towards your previous hours/different hours

Feeling comfortable to express your needs with an AHP report

Reasonable adjustments documented and reviewed regularly

A plan for how things may need to change at home to facilitate your return to work

Support from a knowledgeable team until you feel ready

3.3

Remaining in work well



When you need to prioritise, consider importance and urgency:



- Do** → Highest priority and must be done first.
- Schedule** → Important but can be done later.
- Delegate** → Urgent but can be done by someone else.
- Avoid** → Don't do; neither urgent nor important right now.

3.3

Remaining in work well

Things to consider

Combine your work/home diaries. Plan ahead so you can reduce your overall energy use (e.g., ensuring a work deadline and a busy weekend are not scheduled on the same week).



Regular meetings with your employer. Being open and honest is more likely to keep you in work well (further information to provide your employers can be found in the in resources section).

You can increase/decrease your current responsibilities based on how you are managing and discuss this regularly.



An adjustment passport
([health-adjustment-passport.pdf](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67111/health-adjustment-passport.pdf)
([publishing.service.gov.uk](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67111/health-adjustment-passport.pdf))
([AdjustmentPassport.pdf](https://www.adjustmentpassport.org.uk/)
([tuc.org.uk](https://www.adjustmentpassport.org.uk/))) may be useful for employers to understand how your health condition impacts your work

Remember! It is against the law for employers to discriminate due to a disability or long term health condition



3.3

Remaining in work well

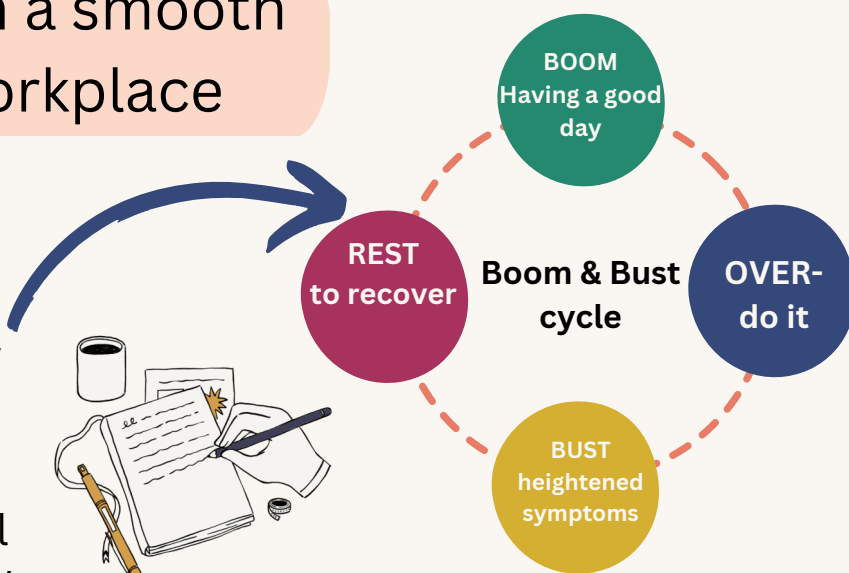


Further tips to help with a smooth moving back in the workplace

Don't increase activities too quickly as you may "crash" 48 hours after activities (you may experience a boom and bust).

An **activity diary** may be useful to monitor any patterns related to fatigue. (See example on page 21).

Create opportunities for regular **rest breaks** throughout the day. This can be something as simple as getting up from your desk to make a cup of tea/ coffee and standing up for 5 minutes for a change in posture.



Consider how you are setting yourself up for each working day. Are you getting enough sleep each night?

Are you committing to multiple social events after a long day?



4.1

What happens if things do not go to plan



Try to resolve the challenges with your employer

Speak with your manager or employer to discuss your difficulties - you can problem solve these together.

Liaise with Occupational Health/HR , they may be able to provide additional support regarding your return to work.

Would you benefit from a period of time off? (e.g., with sick/FIT note) to recover and/or access support needed for returning to/remaining in the workplace.

An Allied Health Professional (AHP) report details reasonable adjustments in work that help you to remain well and communicate your health needs to your employer. If you think this will help, a referral to the Stroke Vocational Rehab Team may be appropriate to provide this.

“

You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.

(Martin Luther King Jr.)

”

Please see page 20 for how to contact your union for further support



4.2

What happens if things do not go to plan



If you feel your current workplace is no longer right for you:

**Skills
House**

Consider accessing employability services to support with finding, interviewing for, and acquiring a new job.

Additionally, they could advise on access to further education and courses if changing career or upskilling is important for you, or advice regarding self-employment. For example, SkillsHouse is a local employability service for the Bradford area (a link is included in resources).

Consider whether leaving work well/taking early retirement on medical grounds would be beneficial for your overall health and wellbeing. It might be helpful to speak with the Vocational Rehab Team who can advise you further.

If you feel you are being unfairly treated in the work place, and the situation cannot be resolved through open communication, this can be a very uncomfortable and difficult situation. ACAS provide impartial advice on your rights and provide support with workplace disputes.

Further information can be found in the resources section



Resources

Going back to work after a Stroke or Brain Injury

- Stroke Association advice things to consider before returning to work <https://www.stroke.org.uk/stroke/life-after/getting-back-work/while-youre-work-after-stroke>
- Stroke Association advice for returning to work after a Stroke- [complete guide work and stroke.pdf](#)
- Different Strokes advice regarding work- [Work After Stroke \(differentstrokes.co.uk\)](#)
- Headway (Brain Injury Charity) advice regarding work - <https://www.headway.org.uk/about-brain-injury/individuals/practical-issues/returning-to-work-after-brain-injury/>
- All Things Stroke <https://www.wyh-allthingsstroke.nhs.uk>

Talking about Disability

- Talking to an employer about disability - [Disclosing disability to an employer | Disability charity Scope UK](#)
- Should I disclose my disability/health condition to my employer/potential employer - [Disclosing a disability - Swansea University](#)
- Free letter templates to help you communicate with your employer - [Templates for employees | Acas](#)

Advice to help people understand your work needs after stroke

- Helping family and friends understand your needs when returning to work [Work After Stroke \(differentstrokes.co.uk\)](#)
- Helping employers understand your needs when returning to work - [A complete guide to stroke for employers | Stroke Association | Work After Stroke \(differentstrokes.co.uk\)](#)



Resources

Other considerations:

- Understanding stress - <https://differentstrokes.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Stress-InfoPack-PDF.pdf>
- How others can support with communication difficulties after stroke - https://www.chss.org.uk/documents/2013/08/f5_factsheet_communication-pdf.pdf
- Driving after a stroke - <https://www.stroke.org.uk/stroke/life-after/driving#:~:text=After%20a%20stroke%20or%20transient%20ischemic%20attack%20%28TIA,stop%20driving%20for%20a%20minimum%20of%20one%20year.>
- Managing your energy levels - <https://www.rcot.co.uk/sites/default/files/How%20to%20manage%20your%20energy%20levels%202023.pdf>
- Emotional side of stroke recovery: <https://strokeonward.org/guide/>

Lived experiences of Stroke or Brain injury

It may be helpful for you to hear stories from other people who have had a stroke:

- At a younger age - <https://healthtalk.org/experiences/stroke/when-stroke-happens-young-age/>
- How they coped with the changes - <https://healthtalk.org/experiences/stroke/coping-strategies-and-resilience/>
- Various different experiences: <https://differentstrokes.co.uk/what-we-do/survivors-stories/> <https://www.headway.org.uk/about-brain-injury/individuals/brain-injury-and-me/featured-video/>



Resources

Workplace aids and adaptations

- Access to Work is a employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work - [Access to Work: factsheet for customers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-factsheet-for-customers)
- RNIBs [Access to Work factsheet](https://www.rnib.org.uk/access-to-work-factsheet) has a useful explanation of how the scheme works - [Find information about Access to Work for blind and partially sighted people | RNIB](https://www.rnib.org.uk/access-to-work-factsheet)
- To apply for access to work click - [Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition: Apply for an Access to Work grant - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/links/access-to-work-get-support-if-you-have-a-disability-or-health-condition)

Employability information

- SkillsHouse are a local council organisation for supporting people back into work: <https://www.skillshouse.co.uk>

Financial support

- Turn2us is a National charity providing benefit checks and details of grants in the UK. The benefits calculator can be used to help you look at a role on a benefits package - [Tackling Financial Insecurity Together | Turn2us](https://www.turn2us.org.uk/)
- Learn about employee benefits, salary sacrifice schemes and benefits and tax credits after job loss - [Benefits | MoneyHelper](https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/benefits)
- Benefits related to disability or sickness - [What to do if you become disabled: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-to-do-if-you-become-disabled-overview)
- This calculator helps determine what can be claimed from national and local governments. [Benefits Calculator - entitledto - independent | accurate | reliable](https://www.entitledto.co.uk/benefits-calculator)
- A comprehensive guide to financial support https://www.stroke.org.uk/benefits_and_financial_assistance_guide.pdf



Resources

The Law (UK)

- Citizens Advice- For general advice and signposting appropriate services - <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>
- The Equality Act in relation to work- [Disability rights: Employment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/disability-rights-employment)
- Dealing with discrimination in employment - [Technical Difficulties \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/technical-difficulties)
- Discrimination: your rights - [Discrimination: your rights: Types of discrimination \('protected characteristics'\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/discrimination-types)
- Health and Safety for disabled people - [Health and safety for disabled people at work - HSE](https://www.hse.gov.uk/healthandsafetyfordisabledpeople/)
- ACAS - support with workplace disputes - <https://www.acas.org.uk/>

Occupational health

Your employer may have its own occupational health team or use an outside agency. An employer might want to use occupational health to help:

- when an employee is struggling with their physical or mental health
- make reasonable adjustments
- when an employee has been off sick or is returning to work
- reduce the amount of time people need to take off sick
- keep to other health and safety regulations
- control risks to mental health, such as too much pressure at work, bullying and harassment

Trade Union Support

Contact your union to discuss what support they can offer you.

Union stewards can offer you advice and help you if you need to write raise an issue at work.

As part of union membership you may also have access to legal advice and support.

Here is a link to find a trade union if you are not already a member:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/join-a-union>

Activity Diary

Example day:

Activity diary key:

Mon
Sleep
Shower
Eat breakfast
Tidy kitchen
Short walk
Make lunch
Nap
School pick up
Make tea and tidy kitchen
Watch tv
Sleep

	High Demand (e.g., I am exhausted or could be if I continue with this activity too long)
	Medium Demand (e.g., I can do this for a short burst of time or only as long as needed)
	Low Demand (e.g., I feel refreshed or I could do this activity all day) Includes sleep/rest.

Why use activity diaries?

- 1 To understand where our energy is being used.
- 2 To plan our day/week to ensure our energy levels stay balanced.

Try plan your own using the template below:

- 1 Which activities did you do yesterday? Put these in order of when you completed them.
- 2 How that activity made you feel?
- 3 Try to fill out your daily activities and assign them to red/amber/green

