

Returning to Work

Returning to work is a major concern for many dealing with Long COVID. You can speak with your healthcare provider and employer to create a specific plan for return-to-work activities. Accommodation may be needed to ensure that work resumption does not worsen your symptoms.

- **Long COVID can be considered a disability for the purposes of accommodations at work** – The federal government has determined that long COVID is “a persistent and significant health issue” and that it can be considered a disability requiring accommodations. This means Long COVID is covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other federal laws that protect people with disabilities from discrimination.
- **An accommodation** is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done in order to enable a person experiencing a disability to have an equal opportunity to perform their job to the same extent as someone without a disability.
- Work activities and return to work should be advanced and accommodations should be modified as you are able to tolerate.

Examples of accommodation:

- Working a limited number of hours.
- Working from home.
- Adjusting work activities (e.g., seated instead of standing/walking activities).
- Using durable medical equipment (e.g., mobility aid to increase walking tolerance).
- Providing additional breaks throughout the day.
- Adjusting the work environment (e.g., allowing you to park closer).

Want more information?

1. **Long COVID considered a disability:** www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-providers/civil-rights-covid19/guidance-long-covid-disability/index.html
2. **Requesting accommodations:**
 - a. www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/employers/accommodations
 - b. askjan.org/topics/COVID-19.cfm

Options If You Cannot Return To Work

Family Medical Leave (FML) – FML is up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave from your job due to your medical condition. Your benefits (i.e. health insurance) remain active. This time off may be paid if you have accumulated paid time off. Speak to your manager or HR representative about this process at your job.

Short-term disability (STD) – usually provided through your employer (ask your boss or HR). Payments can typically start within 2 weeks of an application, they can last typically for 3 to 6 months, and can provide you with up to 80% of your gross monthly income.

Long-term disability (LTD) – usually provided through your employer (ask your boss or HR). Payments typically start after 90 days or at the end of short-term disability, coverage can last anywhere from 2 to 5 to 10 years or until retirement, and can provide you with up to 60% through gross monthly income.

Social Security Disability (SSDI) – Social Security pays disability benefits to people who cannot work because they have a medical condition that is expected to last at least 1 year. To qualify for these payments, Social Security has to determine that your medical condition is disabling (unable to work) and you have to have worked a job where you paid into the Social Security system. The Social Security website has lots of information about how to apply for SSDI.

Department of Social Services (DSS) – your county Department of Social Services is a place that you can go to for emergency assistance with paying bills such as rent or utilities that are in danger of being shut off. You can apply for programs such as Low Income Energy Assistance (LIEAP). You can apply for Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), formerly known as food stamps. DSS is also where you would apply for Medicaid if you lose your employer-based health insurance. When applying for any program at DSS, you should also talk with the person assisting you about any other financial support programs for which you might be eligible.

Want more information?

1. Social Security Disability

- a. www.ssa.gov/disability
- b. www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10029.pdf
- c. www.ssa.gov/disability/Documents/SSA-1170-KIT.pdf

2. Local listings of Department of Social Services:

www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/local-dss-directory

