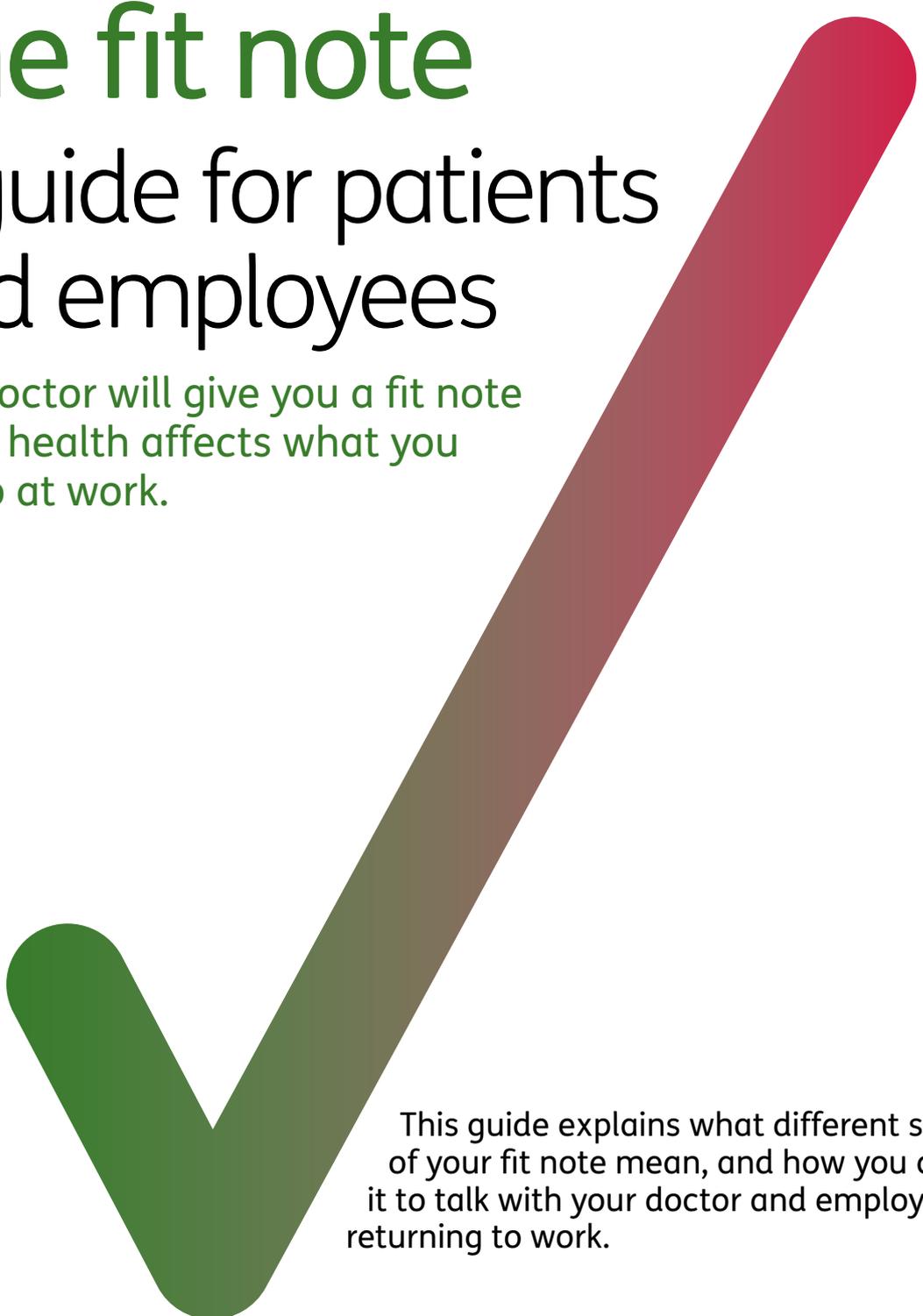


The fit note

A guide for patients and employees

Your doctor will give you a fit note
if your health affects what you
can do at work.



This guide explains what different sections
of your fit note mean, and how you can use
it to talk with your doctor and employer about
returning to work.



How the fit note works

Doing the right kind of work is good for your health, including if you have a health condition.

You don't always need to be fully recovered to go back to work, and in fact it can often help your recovery.

Your fit note can help you go back to work when you're able to.

Your doctor will not automatically assess that you are not fit for work if you have a health condition.

Instead, they will discuss with you how your health affects what you can do at work.

They will think about your fitness for work in general rather than just your current job.

You should ask your doctor to give you practical advice in the fit note about what you can do at work, rather than simply record your health condition.

You should then discuss this advice with your employer, to see if they can make any changes to help you return to work.

“I think work improves people's health if they're in a job that's giving them job satisfaction, income and a routine in their day - it can be very beneficial for most people to go back to work.” (GP)

How work affects your health

If your doctor doesn't ask you about how your health affects what you can do at work, you should raise the issue yourself.

Research shows that work can be good for your physical and mental health, lowers the risk of experiencing financial difficulties, and improves your overall quality of life.

You do not always need to be 100% 'fit' to be able to do some work – indeed, work can help your recovery from health problems or support your all-round wellbeing if you have a long term health condition.

Your doctor is there to help you with your health. Doctors understand that work can be good for your health, and will talk to you about what you can do and whether you could return to work without making your health worse.

Getting a fit note

Your doctor will only give you a fit note if your health affects your fitness for work. The fit note is your property and you should keep it – your employer can take a copy if they want one for their records.

If you are fit for work, you do not need a fit note. You also do not need one if you are off sick for seven calendar days or less, because you can self-certify your leave for this time (see a template at www.hmrc.gov.uk/forms/sc2.pdf).

Your doctor cannot give you a fit note for non-medical problems (such as problems at home or relationship trouble at work). They may, however, be able to suggest other sources of help (some are listed in [further support](#)).

Rules of the fit note

You should get a fit note from the doctor who is treating you. This will usually be your GP, but if you are getting treatment in hospital you

should ask for one from your hospital doctor (if you don't already have one). Fit notes can either be handwritten or printed, but must be signed by a doctor. Duplicate fit notes can only be issued if the original has been lost.

The fit note is classed as advice from your doctor. Your employer can decide whether or not to accept it, and your doctor cannot get involved in any disputes between you and your employer. You may wish to seek help from a trade union or [Acas](#) in such situations.

How your doctor will assess your fitness for work

Your doctor will assess your fitness for work by considering how your health affects what you can do at work (for example your stamina and concentration).

They will decide whether you are not fit for work of any kind, or whether you may be fit for work taking account of their advice.

Your doctor will not automatically assess that you are not fit for work if you have a health condition, and they will consider your fitness for work in general instead of just thinking about your current job.

This gives you and your employer the maximum flexibility to think about ways to help you go back to work (which might include moving you to a different job for a while or changing your duties).

If you are out of work

You can use your fit note to support a claim for benefits. There is more information on the fit note itself, or at www.gov.uk/browse/benefits

If your fit note says that you are not fit for work

Show the fit note to your employer to arrange your sick pay. They can take a copy but you should keep the original.

It's usually a good idea to keep in touch with your employer while you're away, so that you're ready when it's time to go back. You can get advice about sick pay from your trade union or at www.gov.uk/browse/working/time-off

“Work is useful and it's actually really detrimental if I'm just signing people off.” (GP)

If your fit note says that you may be fit for work

Your doctor will give you advice in the rest of your fit note about how your health affects what you can do at work – make sure you discuss this with them and understand their advice.

You should discuss your fit note with your employer to see if they can help you return to work - this won't necessarily mean doing your old job, or working full time. We know that employers want to help their employees return to work, and can often make changes to the workplace or job duties.

Your local safety representative or trade union may be able to help you in your discussions, and the checklist below may help you prepare for them:

- Look at the **tick boxes** and **comment box** for advice on what you can do at work, and how your employer could support you;
- Check how long your fit note lasts and whether you are expected to be fit for work when it expires (explaining the **sections of the fit note** explains how you can do this);
- Think of **possible changes** to help you return to work.

It may be helpful to put any changes you agree down in writing, so that everyone is clear on what has been agreed. See an **example** of someone using their fit note to help them go back to work.

If your employer cannot make any changes, they do not have to. In these circumstances, you should treat your fit note as if it said that you are not fit for work and use it as explained above. You should not go back to your doctor for a new fit note. See an [example](#) of this situation.

The tick boxes

The tick boxes enable your doctor to indicate the kind of general adaptations that might help you return to work. This is not binding on you, and you should feel free to discuss other options.

- **A phased return to work:** a gradual increase in work duties or hours
- **Altered hours:** changing your work times or total hours
- **Amended duties:** changing your work duties
- **Workplace adaptations:** changing aspects of your workplace

The comments box

Your doctor can use the comments box to give you more detailed advice about the impact of your condition on what you can do at work. This will be advice about what you can do at work in general, and will not be tied to your current job - this gives you and your employer maximum flexibility to discuss ways to help you return to work.

It is helpful for your doctor to give practical information about what you can do at work – eg ‘should not drive, take regular breaks if using a display screen’ instead of simply ‘dry eyes’. If your doctor thinks that your job may be affecting your health, they will also indicate this in the comments box.

The information in this box is often very helpful for employers, so you should ask your doctor to provide advice here if they can. Ask your doctor to include details about how your condition affects what you can do at work, rather than simply a diagnosis or description of your symptoms.

“Changes are something that people agree with their manager. We encourage the manager and the employee to work out what’s best for them.” (Employer)

Possible changes

Check [further support](#) for other resources which could help, and guidance for particular conditions. You should discuss anything that you think would help – some examples are listed below:

- Changing to a different job or location
- Reduced or flexible hours, or a phased return to work
- Changing work premises or equipment
- Changing your duties / giving some of your tasks to somebody else
- Providing additional training or supervision
- Providing a reader or interpreter
- Working from home
- Arranging a mentor or work buddy
- Working in a team instead of by yourself (or vice versa)
- Arranging for an [occupational health assessment](#).

Going back to work

You should go back to work as soon as you feel able to and with your employer’s agreement - this may be before your fit note runs out. You do not need to go back to see your doctor before going back to work. Your doctor cannot give you a fit note stating that you are ‘fit for work’.

For a small number of jobs there are separate processes to ensure it is safe for you to return. If this applies to you, your employer will tell you. You do not need a fit note to cover this period while you wait for your employer’s assessment and your doctor will not be able to issue further fit notes to cover it.

Explaining the sections of the fit note

Statement of Fitness for Work For social security or Statutory Sick Pay

1 Patient's name

2 I assessed your case on:

and, because of the following condition(s):

3 I advise you that: you are not fit for work.
 you may be fit for work taking account of the following advice:

4 If available, and with your employer's agreement, you may benefit from:
 a phased return to work amended duties
 altered hours workplace adaptations

Comments, including functional effects of your condition(s):

5 This will be the case for

or from to

6 I will/will not need to assess your fitness for work again at the end of this period.
(Please delete as applicable)

7 Doctor's signature

8 Date of statement

Doctor's address

Unique ID: Med 3 04/10-

For the patient – what to do now
Please read the notes below then fill in your details and, if you are claiming social security benefits, sign and date the declaration. If you cannot fill in your details yourself, ask someone else to do it for you.

What your doctor's advice means

Not fit for work:
Your doctor will advise this when they believe that your health condition means you should refrain from work for the stated period of time.

May be fit for work taking account of the following advice:
Your doctor will recommend this when they believe that you may be able to return to work with some support from your employer. Sometimes it may not be possible for your employer to act on the doctor's advice and you will not be able to return to work until you have further recovered. You do not need to get a further Statement from your doctor to confirm this.

If you are employed
If you are not fit for work, or your employer cannot support your return to work, your employer should consider paying Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) based on the information provided. If SSP cannot be paid, or your SSP is ending, your employer will give you form SSP1 to claim social security benefits. If you are self-employed, you may be able to claim social security benefits because of your health condition.

Social security benefit claimants
If you are claiming social security benefits because of your health condition, send this form to your Jobcentre Plus office. If you are claiming social security benefits for any other reason, you should contact a Personal Adviser to discuss the advice on the form. If you do any work you must inform Jobcentre Plus of your change of circumstances.

If you want to make a new claim to social security benefits you can:

- download a claim form at www.direct.gov.uk/benefits, or
- phone 0800 055 6688 (8am to 6pm Monday to Friday). Textphone users call 0800 023 4888.

Your details – Please use BLOCK CAPITALS

Surname

Other names

Address

Postcode

Date of birth

National Insurance (NI) number

Declaration – for social security benefit claimants only
I agree that my doctor may give the Department for Work and Pensions or a healthcare professional acting on its behalf information which is needed to process my claim for benefit and any request for it to be looked at again.

Signature

Date

If you have signed this form for someone else, please tick here:

- 1 The date your doctor assessed you – either in person or over the telephone, OR when they considered a report from another healthcare professional.
 - 2 The condition(s) affecting your fitness for work. It's usually best for your doctor to be as accurate as possible, but they can enter a less precise diagnosis if being too detailed might harm your position with your employer.
 - 3 Your doctor's assessment that you are either:
 - **Not fit for work**
 - You are not fit for work of any kind.
- OR
- **May be fit for work taking account of the following advice**
 - You may be fit for work, taking account of your doctor's advice in the fit note. This does not necessarily mean doing your current job.
 - 4 Your doctor's advice about the impact of your health condition. See the [comments box](#) for more information.
 - 5 The period that your doctor's advice covers. This will either be from the date of the assessment (Box 1), or between a particular start and end date. These dates are inclusive (so a fit note dated from 2 April to 10 April will no longer apply from 11 April onwards).

This section may cover a previous period if your doctor thinks that your condition has affected your fitness for work before your assessment.

This can be for any time up to an indefinite period.

- 6 Whether your doctor needs to see you at the end of your fit note. If they expect you will be fit for work at the end of the fit note, they will indicate that they do not need to see you again.
- 7 The date the fit note is issued. This may not always be the same as the date of the assessment.
- 8 Your doctor needs to sign the fit note.

IMPORTANT: You can go back to work at any time you feel able to (including before the end of the fit note) without going back to see your doctor - even if your doctor has indicated that they need to assess you again.

“You don't want to go down a road where everything centres around your health. You want to have a life apart from that and that's the good thing about going back to work – you're dealing with people and you have a routine to your life again.”
(Patient)

Examples of how the fit note works

Using the fit note to go back to work...

Working from home

Amir works as a proof-reader for a publishing company, and has a fit note from his GP saying that he has a common cold and cystic fibrosis, but that he may be fit for work taking account of the following advice. The workplace adaptations box is ticked. His fit note has a duration of ten days and his doctor has indicated that they do not need to see him again once it expires.

The advice in the comments box reads: Amir cannot travel into the office because he is at high risk of developing a chest infection whilst he has a cold. The increased risk is due to his pre-existing chest condition - cystic fibrosis. He is able work from home during this period.

Amir and his employer discuss his fit note and agree that he should work from home for the next ten days – his boss emails him some work to do, and he does not go on to sick leave. After ten days, Amir has recovered from his cold and comes back to work as normal without going back to see his GP.

A delivery driver who can't drive

Chris is a delivery driver for a major logistics firm and has just had laser eye surgery. He has been told that he should not drive for two weeks.

His GP explains that the fit note is about his general fitness for work, and discusses what other tasks he can do. The GP indicates on his fit note that he may be fit for work. The comments box reads 'Dry eyes, may experience temporary blurring of vision. Should not drive for two weeks. Can still perform other reasonable physical tasks. Mental function unaffected. If he uses a VDU he should take regular short breaks as per standard guidance.' The GP ticks 'amended duties'.

His GP indicates that they will not need to assess Chris again at the end of the fit note because they expect him to be back to normal by then. Chris and his employer discuss the advice in the fit note.

Although Chris should not drive, his knowledge of the company and its operations means they decide he can work in a back-office role for the two weeks. Chris therefore keeps his full pay, and keeps in the routine of working. After two weeks his eyesight is back to normal and he returns to his previous duties without going back to see his GP.

When an employer can't make changes...

Alice works for a supermarket and visits her doctor complaining of panic attacks. She is diagnosed with anxiety and referred to a local therapy service. Alice says she is too distressed to work.

Alice and her doctor agree that certain tasks may be contributing to her condition and that she should avoid these for now. They decide that there are still things that she can do – for example, physical tasks or back-office duties.

Alice's fit note states that she may be fit for work. The comments box says 'can perform physical tasks, but she gets anxious when faced with demanding situations and should not be left alone in them'. Her doctor ticks 'amended duties'.

Her doctor indicates that they will need to see her again when the fit note expires, which suggests that she may not necessarily be ready to resume her full duties by then.

Alice discusses the advice with her employer, explaining that she finds dealing with customers to be a 'demanding situation'. Her employer can't find a role for her that doesn't involve dealing with customers, and so her fit note is treated as if it said that she is not fit for work and she goes onto sick leave for its duration. She does not go back to her GP for a new fit note because she doesn't need one.

Further support

Managing health conditions at work

Access to Work provides practical and financial support to people with a physical or mental health condition or disability to help them start work or keep a job. This can include paying towards aids or equipment; support workers; communication support at interviews; support services; or travel to and in work.

www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview

Work Life provides information to employers, employees and healthcare professionals on helping people with long-term health conditions to stay in or return to work.

www.yourworkhealth.com

Guidance and support for specific conditions

Get Well Soon – Royal College of Surgeons of England website www.rcseng.ac.uk/patients/get-well-soon provides practical tips and advice about getting back to work after common surgical procedures.

Return to Fitness: Recovering Well – Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists website www.rcog.org.uk/recovering-well/ provides advice on recovery, including return to work, following gynaecological surgery.

Work and Mental Health – Royal College of Psychiatrists website www.rcpsych.ac.uk/workandmentalhealth provides advice about returning to work after a period of mental ill health.

Work and cancer - Macmillan www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Livingwithandaftercancer/Workandcancer/Workandcancer provides information about work and cancer for patients, carers, employers and healthcare professionals.

Upper limb disorders: Occupational aspects of management. Evidence-based guidance for employees. Royal College of Physicians, 2009 bookshop.rcplondon.ac.uk/contents/pub278-01592b5a-5a3d-493a-8e2b-1830ea8f5a24.pdf

Help with personal or social problems

Fit notes can only be issued for medical problems. Your doctor may be able to refer you to support for other personal or social problems. For example:

Problems at work – for help on dealing with bullying, harassment or discrimination and preventing or managing disputes and conflict at work contact Acas on www.acas.org.uk or 08457 47 47 47

Your local trade union or safety representative may also be able to help with issues at work.

Support for carers – www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/Pages/CarersDirectHome.aspx
www.carers.org/

Debt issues www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/debt_e.htm

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/

Career advice www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/Pages/default.aspx

Help with relationships www.relate.org.uk/home/index.html

Occupational health services

Occupational health support can be very helpful in complex cases and when work may be affecting your health. Occupational health services are often provided by large employers and sometimes by the NHS or local authorities. Trade or regional business associations may have details of occupational health providers or other sources of help. For details of providers in your area, contact:

Commercial Occupational Health Provider Association www.cohpa.co.uk

NHS Health at Work www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/support-for-business.asp

Society of Occupational Medicine www.som.org.uk

Safe Effective Quality Occupational Health Service (list of approved occupational health providers) www.seqohs.org

More information on the fit note is available at www.dwp.gov.uk/fitnote

Important information about this leaflet

This is only a guide and does not cover every circumstance. We have done our best to make sure that the information is correct as of March 2013. It is possible that some of the information is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes in the law.



Department
for Work &
Pensions