

# Returning to Work

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## Things to think about when returning to work or school

You don't need to be 100% recovered from long COVID to consider a return to work or school. However, if you're still experiencing symptom flare ups and set-backs, or push/crash cycle (see the [Post-Exertional Malaise \[PEM\]](#) section to learn more about this cycle), it may not be recommended to increase your activities or plan/start a gradual return to work.

There are many reasons why a person might want to return to work or school, and there are different options available depending on your reason(s), resources, and circumstances.

Your main reason for wanting to return to work might be **financial**. If symptoms of PEM or [Dysautonomia](#) are still making your daily life difficult for you, there may be options available other than immediately returning to work as usual. (For other possible options, please see [Return to Work for People Living with Long COVID](#) resource from Realize.org.)



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You may be motivated to return to work or school because it is a source for **meaning** and **purpose** in your life, as well as a way to stay connected with your community. Although returning to productive roles is important for everyone recovering from illness, injury, or disability, there are some things to consider when deciding if it is the right time for you:

“Returning to work might be possible for some, but it is often at the expense of participation in other life roles (ie: familial, household, leisure activities). This should be taken into account when considering employment.”\*

To learn more about pacing and “budgeting” your limited energy, please see the [Pacing](#) topic in *MyGuide*.

\*Quoted from *Return to Work for People Living with Long COVID* by [Realize](#) (published December 3, 2022)

## General recommendations for returning to work or school

1. Speak with human resources (HR) at your workplace, an occupational therapist, or your school’s disability resource centre about what kinds of accommodations or modifications are available to you. Are you able to work or review lectures from home? Can you be allowed more flexible deadlines? Are you able to have someone else take meeting minutes? There may be many ways to save energy

depending on your work or school environment and technology available to you.

2. Have an open conversation about your symptoms and limitations with your school administration, employer, or supervisor. This can help others understand and support you better.
3. Work with your employer on a schedule for returning to work/school.
4. Be open with your employer about the need for a “paced approach” to returning to school or work activities. This is covered in more detail in the [Returning to Physical Activity](#) topic in *MyGuide*.
5. Have a plan for when you might experience a symptom flare or set-back with a push/crash cycle. Return to the level of activity where you were last stable, and look at what physical or cognitive activities you can modify to be less draining.

## Further resources

[Disability Alliance BC](#) is a provincial organization that provides services and advocacy to support people with disabilities, including support with applying for provincial and federal disability benefits and other services. Visit their website for more information and how to connect with an advocate.

Your union or human resources department may be able to help.

There may be disability services and resources available in your area. Call 2-1-1 to find out what’s available close to you.

If your extended health benefits or employer cover private occupational therapy (OT), an occupational therapist with experience in concussion or Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) would be suited for assessing and providing recommendations for long COVID, especially for post-exertional malaise, fatigue, and brain fog. Funding can sometimes be accessed through extended health benefits, your union or human resources, and your employer.

[Realize.org](https://www.realize.org/) is an organization that supports people living with HIV and other episodic disabilities. Their resource, [Return to Work for People Living with Long COVID](#), contains information and recommendations for employers, insurers, human resources, and rehabilitation professionals that are also useful for people with long COVID interested in returning to work.

## Where to next?

- Learn more about [Post-Exertional Malaise \[PEM\]](#), [Dysautonomia](#), and [Pacing](#)
- Check [Return to Work for People Living with Long COVID](#) from Realize.org for other possible options on Returning to Work
- Check [Returning to Physical Activity](#) to learn more about a "paced approach" to return to school or work activities.
- Learn more about these organizations that support and provide services to people living with various disabilities: [Disability Alliance BC](#), [Realize.org](#)

