

# Managing Post COVID-19 Condition Therapeutic Education Program

## Return to Work & School

# Objectives for session:

- When to consider return to work
- Recommendations for return to work
- Preparing for return to work
- What to share with colleagues?
- Group discussion

# When to return to work/school?

- You are able to manage your daily tasks consistently
- You might still have bad days or "crashes" but less frequent/severe
- Even when you feel fatigue, you can still complete your daily tasks
- You have been able to stabilize your symptoms and have a consistent level of activity and feel well



# What are the demands of your job?

- Identify the physical demands
- Identify the cognitive demands – concentration, communication, problem-solving, analysis
- What are some of the emotional challenges? – stress, pressure from deadlines, meeting metrics
- How do you get to work? What is your commute like?
- Do you need to travel for work?
- You may not be able to return to the work you were doing previously

# Recommendations for Return to Work



**Recognizing  
the episodic and  
unpredictable nature  
of Long COVID**



**Prolonged  
phased return**



**Suitable workplace  
accommodations**



**Remote  
work**



**Flexible  
work hours**



**Reduced physical and  
cognitive workload**



**Altered tasks,  
longer time to  
complete tasks**



**Rest-time  
accommodations**

DeMars J, O'Brien KK, Major A, Graham K, Goulding S, Brown DA, Gross D; Recommendations for employers, insurers, human resource professionals on return to work for people living with Long COVID. December 1, 2022; Available at: <https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/Recommendations-for-RtW-doc-final-4-3.pdf>

# Episodic Disability



Recognizing  
the episodic and  
unpredictable nature  
of Long COVID

- Post COVID Condition is considered an episodic disability –
  - Chronic conditions characterized by periods of wellness and illness that may vary in severity, length and predictability from one person to another.
  - Symptoms can come and go/fluctuate and can be unpredictable in periods of severity of illness and function

<https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/Pandemic-Brief-Final.pdf>

# Recommendations for Return to Work:



Prolonged  
phased return

- **Prolonged and gradual return**
  - Often need a longer than typical return to work with slower progression of hours



Suitable workplace  
accommodations

- **Suitable workplace accommodations**
  - Ergonomics, set-up of work station
  - Sit vs. stand
  - Screens
  - Equipment

# Recommendations for Return to Work:



Flexible  
work hours

- **Flexible work hours**
  - Start time, working every other day
  - Avoid night shifts
  - Hours per day



Remote  
work

- **Remote Work**
  - Reduce/eliminate exertion of commute
  - Reduce social interactions
  - Limit environmental stimuli
  - Can lie down for breaks



# Recommendations for Return to Work:



Reduced physical and  
cognitive workload

- **Reduce physical or cognitive workload**
  - Consider the weight of loads you need to move, repetitive movements, standing/walking tolerance
  - Reduce targets, number of cases, etc.
  - Manage demands of communication (consider constant emails, messages, phone calls)

# Recommendations for Return to Work:

- **Altered tasks, more time to complete tasks**
  - What are the essential tasks of your job?
  - Change responsibilities or start with fewer responsibilities
  - Delegate to team members
  - Have more time to complete tasks
  - Plan your most demanding tasks for when you have the most energy (presentations, problem-solving meetings, leading meetings)
  - Schedule shorter meetings
  - Managing screens for remote work – no camera on, dial-in to meetings, print documents for reading



Altered tasks,  
longer time to  
complete tasks

# Recommendations for Return to Work:

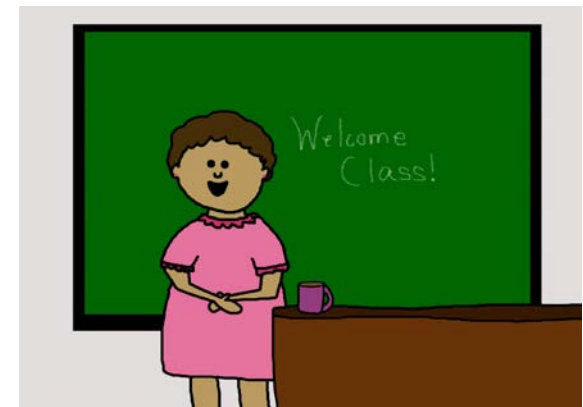
- **Rest-time accommodations**
  - Frequent breaks through the day
  - Working every other day
  - Set specific times for breaks, schedule rest between appointments/tasks
  - Longer meetings benefit from breaks
  - Schedule breaks into your day – remember to take a lunch
  - Every 20 mins, give your eyes a break



Rest-time  
accommodations

# Return to Work Example: Teacher

- Only teach classes that you have taught before (reduce new learning and creating new materials)
- Reduce number of courses
- First floor classroom (limit stairs)
- Use wheeled trolleys to carry materials around the school
- No yard duty / extra-curricular activities
- Light filters or turn off lights in classroom
- Consider how you set up your classroom (less repetitive movement)
- Sit to teach, have students come to you
- Set aside time for independent work and address questions at a specific time



## Return to Work Example: Canada Post Worker

- No night shifts
- Worked 4 shifts per week, reduce hours
- Did not take on extra shifts
- Changed tasks/stations - Sorting was more cognitively demanding but better tolerated than other duties requiring a lot of walking around the plant
- Asked for help to get her kids to their extra-curricular activities
- Limited social activities on the weekends – protected time for rest
- Family assisted with meals & household tasks



# Preparing for Return to Work

- The first number of weeks will be challenging and tiring – plan ahead to give yourself the best chance of success
- Review & prioritize your other tasks/responsibilities
  - Some activities may have to be dropped or delayed
- Have a discussion with family/friends about what your needs are with the transition back to work and how they can support you
- Ask for assistance with household tasks like meals and cleaning
- Many people need a rest period at the end of the workday to manage the evening (even if working from home)

# Preparing for Return to Work

- Adjust your schedule – when you get up / sleep / rest
- Simulate some of your work tasks/demands
  - Reading/writing emails
  - Review spreadsheets or types of data
  - Spend time reading/doing work on a screen
  - Try having a conversation with background noise
- Make a plan to stay connected socially
  - Ask family/friends to check-in with a text/voicemail
  - If you talk on the phone, keep it shorter, lie down, reduce other stimuli
  - Share space with no talking, just come and sit with you

# What to Share With Colleagues

- Think about what you want to share – plan what you want to say, what is the wording?
- Do you have a couple of people who can be your allies?
  - Connect before your return
  - Perhaps a close colleague or your manager
- You can't control how someone responds
- Might be helpful to share resources to help them understand



## Should I Keep Working?

- Some people have continued to work or have returned to work but struggle to keep up with any aspect of their life
- Consider the following:
  - Are you able to manage the demands of your job?
  - What are your other responsibilities/roles outside of work?
  - How often are you experiencing PEM/PESE?
  - Are you experiencing onset of new symptoms?
- Keep your doctor informed of how you are managing so they can support you

# Summary

- Consider return to work when you have consistency in managing daily activities without triggering PEM
- Consider the demands of the work you are returning to
- Consider the types of accommodations needed for return to work
- Plan for your transition back to work, and consider how to manage your other roles/responsibilities
- It may be necessary to pause your return to work plan if you experience increased symptoms and PEM/PESE





[Postcovidrehabphc@unityhealth.to](mailto:Postcovidrehabphc@unityhealth.to)



# Return to School

# Return to School: Considerations

## Your abilities and challenges:

- Attention and cognitive stamina
- Organization & planning skills
- Communication
- Memory and learning
- Physical stamina and fatigue
- Screen tolerance
- Pain
- Emotional resources and challenges

# Return to School: Considerations

## Demands of your program:

- In person vs. virtual
- Size of classes
- Evaluation (presentations, exams, papers, participation etc.)
- Time of day
- Length of lectures
- Schedule
- Course load
- Commute
- Moving around campus
- Access to academic support and accommodations

# Accommodations

- Under the Ontario Human Rights Code all colleges and universities have a duty to accommodate disabilities on an individual basis; accommodations can also be made for licensing exams and for clinical placements
- Accommodations allow participation despite physical, emotional or cognitive disabilities
- Schools usually have an office or service centred around accessibility (different names)
- Each school would have a process to follow in order to apply for accommodations and be registered with the office of accessibility
- It helps to have a detailed assessment of some kind, but a number of different professionals, including your family doctor, would usually be able to provide the documentation the school needs in order to develop accommodations for an individual student



# Examples of Accommodations: Academic

- Reduced course load (fatigue; more time needed to review lectures, course material)
- Balanced schedule of classes
- Access to note-taking services (fatigue, divided attention problems)
- Permission to record lectures, or permanent access to recordings & slides
- Early access to slides, outlines (to support listening comprehension)
- Exemption from oral presentations (word-finding problems, slow oral expression)
- Appropriate software: screen reader, dictation, spelling/grammar
- Extended deadlines (more time needed to read, plan, write; allow for health setbacks)
- Extended time for tests and exams; breaks; exams in segments
- Tests taken in quiet environment; one exam per day

# Examples of Accommodations: Physical

- Virtual vs. in person (screen intolerance vs burden of commute, sensory overload)
- Access to on-campus transportation
- Oral exams if writing/typing is an issue
- Preferred seating (easy access, sensory overload)
- Low lighting
- Voice amplifier or excused from oral presentations

# Resources

\*Some of these resources are very detailed, you may want to have someone review it first to see which parts are relevant or helpful to you.

1. Accommodating and Communicating About Episodic Disabilities (ACED) Presentation by Monique A. M. Gignac, PhD. - *Long COVID as an Episodic Disability: Implications for Workplace Communication, Disclosure and Accommodation Planning*:

[https://aced.iwh.on.ca/sites/aced/files/presentations/Gignac\\_Presentation\\_EARN\\_Conference\\_Nov2022.pdf](https://aced.iwh.on.ca/sites/aced/files/presentations/Gignac_Presentation_EARN_Conference_Nov2022.pdf)

2. Tool to outline the demands of your work and helps guide a discussion around how much help you need and what should be put in place to support your work.

Canada Life - Workplace Strategies for Mental Health. *Supporting Employee Success*:

<https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/a-tool-to-support-employee-success>

3. DeMars J, O'Brien KK, Major A, Graham K, Goulding S, Brown DA, Gross D; *Recommendations for employers, insurers, human resource professionals on return to work for people living with Long COVID*. December 1, 2022; Available at:

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# Resources

## 4. Job Accommodations Network (JAN):

Long COVID – <https://askjan.org/disabilities/Long-COVID.cfm>

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome –

<https://askjan.org/disabilities/Myalgic-Encephalomyelitis-Chronic-Fatigue-Syndrome.cfm>

## 5. Job Demands and Accommodations Planning Tool (JDAPT):

<https://aced.iwh.on.ca/jdapt>