

Returning to work

If the stroke is reasonably mild and a return to work is planned, discussion should be held with the employer at as early a stage as possible about keeping the job open, or providing a different job, e.g. less physical, or shorter hours.

The employer may request permission to write to the specialist for an opinion on progress and an estimate of the time you need for rehabilitation before returning to work.

What helps

- Make sure the employer and workmates have enough information about stroke to understand potential difficulties, i.e. slowness or fatigue – this will make both them and you feel more comfortable about resuming a work relationship. You could ask the Stroke Foundation CSA to give them background details
- Have the work site and your role assessed for suitability (discuss this with the occupational therapist)
- Get in contact with a Stroke Foundation Return to Work Advisor. They provide expertise and support to guide stroke survivors through the process of returning to gainful employment. This is a free service available to stroke survivors under the age of 65 in the Greater Auckland and Christchurch regions
- Find out about equipment to make your role easier, e.g. a shoulder rest for a telephone to allow you to write while taking a call
- Be honest with yourself and others about your present capabilities
- Don't overcommit or overstretch yourself: remember that for a while you will continue to tire more quickly
- Plan your working day – with the idea of taking pressure off yourself, not seeing how many extra things you can fit in

- Plan a gradual return to work, e.g. start with only a few hours a day.

When it is not feasible to return to a former job

- Discuss with the occupational therapist and other members of the rehabilitation team the possibility of preparing for different work that will accommodate limitations caused by the stroke
- Be flexible about changing occupation, adapting lifestyle, developing new or latent skills – in a year's time the future is going to look quite different to the one envisaged when you first learn you 'can't go back to work'. Give yourself time to absorb the implications and adapt
- If it is not possible to return to paid work, consider voluntary work, transferring your skills to another area
- Getting back to work in any shape or form will put structure into the day and do wonders for confidence
- However, remember there is a time in life to be retired! Some people with a stroke have a very 'successful' retirement.