When Can I Go Back to Work?

Not everyone goes back to work after a brain injury. For those who do, there are many reasons for wanting to work again. Not only is it a way to earn money, but also a chance to have social contact, structure to the day and stimulation.

Going back to work needs to be carefully timed to make sure you succeed. Your health must be stable and any lingering symptoms must be well controlled (e.g. seizures and headaches). Also, enough time must have passed after your brain injury to make sure that you have had enough time to recover.

Build your skills, abilities and endurance

It is important to prepare yourself for work by maximizing your independence in daily activities such as:

- Managing symptoms such as headaches, sleep problems, fatigue, seizures, anxiety and depression.
- Thinking skills (for example, memory, concentration, multi-tasking, problem solving)
- Personal care activities (grooming, dressing, toileting, bathing)
- Maintaining personal hygiene
- Remembering and being on time for appointments
- Effectively managing your time and activities; organizing and taking part in leisure activities
- Mobility, including getting around in the community
- Transportation
- · Managing finances such as budgeting, banking and paying bills
- Taking your medications
- Using strategies to manage memory, thinking, fatigue, communication, emotional and physical changes
- Planning and decision making
- Building your physical and cognitive endurance through recreation, courses and/or volunteer work

Make sure your abilities match the requirements of the job

- When you are confident that you can handle your daily activities, think about whether your abilities match the requirements of your previous job. Or whether a new job would be better. Will you need to learn some new skills?
- It is usually a good idea to go back to a familiar job and employer. This is because your employer is in the best position to make changes to support your needs at work.
- You may need to consider a different, perhaps less demanding, job or school program in order to succeed at going back to work.

Checklist for Thinking (or Rethinking) about Employment:

This checklist is one tool to help you assess your readiness for employment. On its own, this checklist cannot determine if are ready to go back to work. If the timing is not right for you to be thinking about employment, then there are some recommendations listed at the end of the checklist.

<u>Instructions</u>: For each topic, check off one box (in Column 1, 2 or 3). Total your checkmarks for each column at the end. Review your answers with a health care professional (such as an occupational therapist, psychologist, counsellor, vocational counsellor, or your doctor). After reviewing your answers in the checklist, you and your health care professional can consider the recommendations at the end of the checklist, to help guide you in your continuing recovery and thinking (or re-thinking) about employment.

| | COLUMN 1: | COLUMN 2: | COLUMN 3: |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| TOPIC | High Barriers to Employment | Moderate Barriers to Employment | Low Barriers to Employment |
| Headaches | ☐ Headaches frequently limit my activities | ☐ Headaches sometimes limit my activities | ☐ Headaches do not limit my activities |
| Sleep | ☐ I sleep poorly most nights | ☐ I have some difficulties with sleep | ☐ I have no problems with sleep |
| Daytime Fatigue | ☐ I need to take daily naps | ☐ I need to take occasional naps | ☐ I don't need to take naps |
| Seizures | ☐ My seizures are not controlled | ☐ My seizures are controlled but I do not have medical clearance to work | ☐ I do not have seizures (this includes if they are controlled with medication) |
| Thinking Skills | ☐ I have significant difficulties with thinking skills, for example with memory, concentration, multi-tasking, etc. | ☐ I have some difficulties with thinking skills | ☐ I am able to manage independently with my thinking skills, for example through use of strategies |
| Emotional well- being | ☐ My mood is down or I get anxious easily. It is an effort for me to do everyday tasks and/or to socialize | ☐ My mood or anxiety has some ups/downs that stop me from doing things on some days | ☐ My mood is stable. I have no problems with anxiety or depressed mood |
| Personal care and hygiene | ☐ I need assistance and reminders for personal care including hygiene and toileting | ☐ It takes more than an hour to get ready in the morning, or I need some reminders for personal hygiene | ☐ I am independent for personal care and hygiene. I do not need reminders. I can get ready in less than an hour in the morning |

^{*} If you have any feedback about this checklist please send your comments to info@brainstreams.ca.

| Attending appointments | ☐ I need assistance to be on time for appointments and to get there | ☐ I need some reminders to be on time but I can get there on my own | ☐ I am independent remembering and getting to my appointments |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Managing time and activities | ☐ I need help to plan and manage my activities. I am doing very few or no leisure activities | ☐ I need some reminders to help plan and manage my activities. I am doing some leisure activities | □ I am independent planning, organizing and carrying out my activities. I am doing some or many leisure activities |
| Mobility (walking, wheelchair) | ☐ I need assistance or supervision for mobility indoors & outdoors | ☐ I need some assistance and cannot get around outside on my own | ☐ I am fully independent for mobility indoors & outdoors |
| Transportation | ☐ I need assistance from others for transportation | ☐ I need some assistance/reminders, for example to help plan transportation. | ☐ I am independent with planning and taking transportation for all of my activities |
| Managing finances | ☐ I need assistance to budget, do banking and pay bills | ☐ I need some assistance or reminders to manage my money | ☐ I am independent in managing my money including banking and paying my bills |
| Taking medication | ☐ I need assistance or reminders for medication | ☐ I need some reminders for my medication | ☐ I am independent with my medication |
| Using strategies | ☐ I need assistance to use strategies (e.g. notes, daytimer, pacing, communication aid, and/or to manage anxiety or frustration) | ☐ I have started to use strategies but I am not using them daily and/or I require some reminders to use the strategies | ☐ I am efficient and independent in using strategies, without reminders or assistance from others. |
| Planning & decision making | ☐ I need others to help me with planning and decision making | ☐ I need some assistance with planning and decision making | ☐ I have no difficulties with planning and decision making and others are not concerned about me |
| Rehabilitation therapies | ☐ My rehabilitation activities or therapies take up 2 or more days per week | ☐ I am still involved in some rehabilitation activities, but only once per week or less | ☐ I have completed all of my formal rehabilitation activities and therapies |
| Up-to-date skills and education | ☐ It has been a long time since I have worked. My training and education might be out of date. | ☐ It has been a while since I have worked. My skills and education may be out of date. | ☐ It has been less than 6 months since I have worked. My training and education are up to date. |
| Totals: | Column One: | Column Two: | Column Three: |

Wrap-Up and Recommendations:

After you have filled in the checklist, review it with a health care professional (for example, an occupational therapist, psychologist, counsellor, vocational counsellor, or your doctor). Following are some recommendations to discuss with your health care professional:

If you have checkmarks in Column 1 or 2...

 You may or may not be ready for paid employment.

Recommendations:

- Keep focusing your energy on rehabilitation activities and therapies.
- If you are having problems with headaches, sleep, fatigue, seizures, or emotional wellbeing then, if you have not already done so, talk to your health care professional.
- Ensure that you are following-through on good personal hygiene.
- Find ways to build your endurance, for example a regular exercise program.
- Learn useful strategies to manage problems with fatigue, memory, anxiety, frustration, communication, etc. An occupational therapist or other health care professional can help with this. Remember – it takes lots of practice & repetition to use your strategies successfully and out of habit!
- Aim to become involved in regularly scheduled activities & a weekly schedule (recreation and social activities, exercise).
- Some community activities that you may want to try include the following:
 - Fitness class (review options with your health-care professional)
 - Stoke recovery group or brain injury drop-in centre
 - Take a class (e.g., art, photography, music, computer skills)
 - Public lectures (at a library, college)
- Think about doing some volunteer work.
 This will help you get back into a regular schedule, make contact with other people, and build your resume.

If most or all checkmarks are in Column 3...

- You may be ready for paid employment.
 This may be a good time to connect with a vocational rehabilitation counsellor to explore options and resources.
- Always check with your doctor or other healthcare professional before considering a return to work.