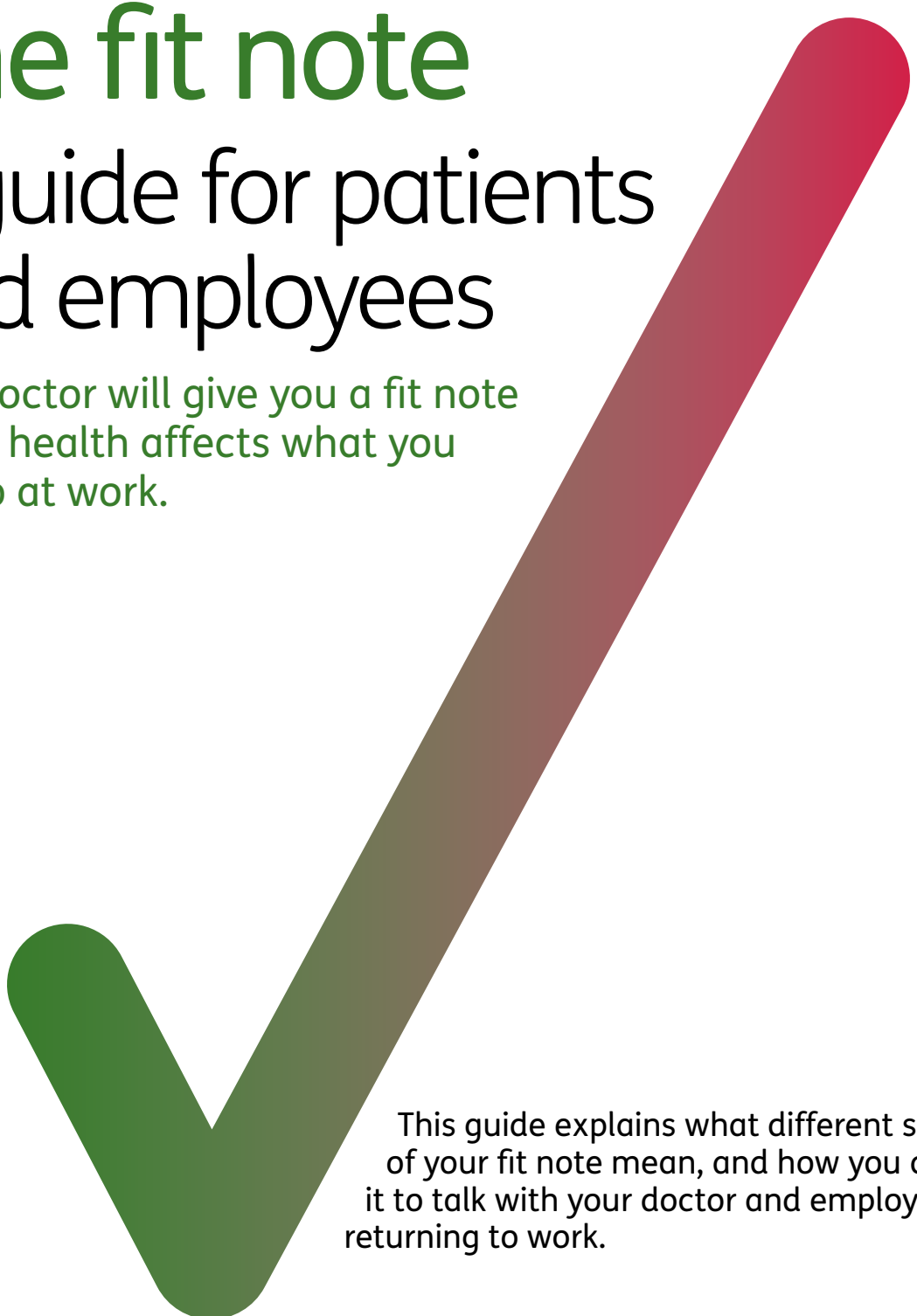


The fit note

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.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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.

They may discuss Fit for Work with you which is a new service that may help you return to work more quickly.

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.

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 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-sick-pay-employees-statement-of-sickness-sc2>

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](#)).

Once you have reached, or in the opinion of your GP, are expected to reach, four weeks of sickness absence, you can be referred by them for an assessment by Fit for Work

The purpose of this assessment is to give you, your employer and your GP more occupational health information to assist your return to work more quickly. It is a voluntary service where you can consent to a referral and participation in Fit for Work.

Following a Fit for Work assessment (which is done with your consent), you will be provided with a Return to Work Plan which can be used as evidence in place of a fit note. The Fit for Work assessment will provide advice on steps on a Return to Work Plan to help support you back into work.

A fit note may still be required to cover the first two weeks of sickness absence from when a referral is made to a Fit for Work assessment. Once a Return to Work Plan has been issued, this can be used in place of a fit note.

You can also access the advice line or use their website to get general health and work advice.

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).

The Government has recently launched a new programme called Fit for Work, which is designed to help you return to work more quickly. Your GP or employer can refer you to the programme with your consent. Once referred, an occupational health professional helps design a Return to Work Plan to help you return to work. Legislation now means this plan can be accepted as evidence by your employer in the same way as a GP Fit Note. You do not need to obtain further fit notes from your GP. For more information, go to www.fitforwork.org

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

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.

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.

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.

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

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):

Unique ID: Med 3 04/10-

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

DedARATION – for social security benefit claimants only

☐ 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.

A GP can record here whether a referral to **Fit for Work** has been made, or their reason for not referring, if relevant.

- 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.

Illustrative examples of how the fit note works

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

Case study one:

Working from home

A proof reader for a publishing company 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: Your employee cannot travel into the office because he is at local 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.

The employee and his employer discuss his fit note 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, he has recovered from his cold and comes back to work as normal without going perform back to see his GP.

Case study two:

A delivery driver who can't drive

A delivery driver for a major logistics firm 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 him again at the end of the fit note because they expect him to be back to normal by then. The driver and his employer discuss the advice in the fit note.

Although he should not drive, the driver's knowledge of the company and its operations means they decide he can work in a back-office role for the two weeks. The employee 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.

Case study three:

An employer makes changes based on a Fit for Work Assessment

A supermarket worker visits her doctor complaining of panic attacks. She is diagnosed with anxiety disorder and says she's too distressed to work. Your patient says she is too distressed to work. She works on the Customer Service Desk dealing with complaints and returns from customers. This sometimes leads to confrontational encounters with difficult customers. She thinks the job is causing her panic attacks and does not see how she can go back to work.

She and her doctor agree that certain tasks may be contributing to her condition and that and 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. This helps her feel more positive.

The GP issues a two week fit note but also explains that as she might be absent from work for four weeks or more, she may benefit from a referral to Fit for Work for an occupational health assessment. She agrees to this.

An occupational health professional from Fit for Work contacts her by telephone within two days. During the conversation, it is established that she wants to return to work as soon as possible, and her health professional discusses with her possible adjustments that could be made at work to allow her to return.

The OH professional and employee jointly agree a Return to Work Plan which she is happy to be shared with her GP and employer.

The Return to Work Plan recommends she has a phased return to work starting with just a few hours a day as well as other workplace adjustments which include not having to deal with customers during busy periods.

For the next four weeks, the employer arranges for her to do quieter shifts or work away from the shop floor. By keeping in touch with her employer while she was off, she did not feel too 'out of the picture', and by returning to work she has helped safeguard her longer-term mental and physical health. Following a recommendation in her Return to Work Plan, her employer also arranges for your patient to attend a course which teaches coping techniques. This is intended to help her become more confident when dealing with the public

After four weeks the employee informs her Fit for Work case manager that she feels more confident about dealing with the public and says she would like to return to normal duties. Her employer agrees to this. The Fit for Work case manager lets her GP know that she has returned to full duties at work.

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

Get Well Soon – Royal College of Surgeons of England website <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/patients/recovering-from-surgery> 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 <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patientleaflets/?q=&subject=Recovering+Well&orderby=title> provides advice on recovery, including return to work, following gynaecological surgery.

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

Work and cancer – Macmillan <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/Cancerinformation/Livingwithandaftercancer/Workandcancer/Workandcancer.aspx> 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 https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/sites/default/files/upper-limb-disorders-national-guideline-full-text_0.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 – <http://www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/carerslives/updates/pages/carersdirecthelpline.aspx> www.carers.org/

Debt issues

www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/debt_e.htm
www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/

Career advice <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

Help with relationships
<http://www.relate.org.uk/>

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 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-note>

Fit for Work**England and Wales**

Telephone number - 0800 032 6235 (English language line) or 0800 035 6233 (Llinell Gymraeg)

Website - www.fitforwork.org

Fit for Work Scotland

Telephone number - 0800 019 2211

Website - www.FitforWorkScotland.scot

Notes

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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 September 2015. It is possible that some of the information is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes in the law.



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