



Returning to Work and Career Pathways

If you have lost a limb/s due to accident or illness you may no longer be able to do the job you used to do. Alternatively, you may be able to return to your place of employment but will need some workplace modifications made and/or assistive technology so that you can perform your duties.

Returning to Work - Case Studies

Peter had worked as a plumber all of his life. Unfortunately, a failed knee replacement and bone infection led to an above knee amputation. Peter could no longer work 'on the tools', climb around underneath houses or move and fit hot water services. Peter loved his job and really wanted to stay in the plumbing industry. After a conversation with his employer, it was agreed that Peter would continue to help to train new apprentices while they were based in the factory, but he would also take on a greater role in the office speaking to clients and use his wealth of plumbing knowledge to gain more clients.

Gary was involved in a motorbike accident. Gary lost his right arm above the elbow and his leg below the knee. At the time Gary was studying to become a graphic designer. His passion for graphic design was so strong he was determined to work out a way that he could continue his studies. By accessing the right kind of computer software, a modified desk and specialised chair to support his needs Gary completed his study. After completing his studies Gary set up a successful graphic design and website development business. Six years on Gary has a vast array of clients and his creative work is in high demand.

Mary was a busy kindergarten teacher until she lost her leg to cancer in 2015. Following her treatment and recovery, Mary was very keen to return to work. Mary needed a prosthetic device which would support her balance, provide her with stability and enable her to get down on the floor with the children. After trialling a few different knee units and feet, Mary finally decided on the prosthesis which would best meet her needs in the workplace. While Mary is unable to run after the children in the playground, she can still work closely with the children in the ways she did prior to losing her leg.

Just because you can't do what you used to do it doesn't mean that your skills are any less valuable and cannot be utilised for another purpose.

Workplace Modifications and Assistive Technology



What is available to help me?

Think about the devices and products which would enable you to successfully carry out your duties at work. There are a wide range of devices and assistive technology which can help you to achieve your employment goals.

Accessibility

If you have had a lower limb amputation then accessing your place of work may be challenging, especially if there are lots of steps. It is worth having a conversation with an occupational therapist to discuss any workplace barriers you might be experiencing and what modifications can be made to make access easier for you.

Parking

If you drive to work think about your options. Is there accessible parking available? Can an accessible carpark be created for you? You may be eligible for a disabled parking permit. Follow up with your local Council.

Equipment

To help you complete tasks it might just be a matter of getting the right workplace tools and equipment. What kinds of equipment are available to help you to do your job successfully? For example, if you have lost an upper limb and you work in an office, would a headset, dragon software system, one-handed mouse, high/low lift desk help you to complete your tasks. An occupational therapist can assist you to identify the right equipment for you.

Assistive Technology (prosthetics)

Upper limb

If you are an upper limb amputee and previously worked with your hands would fitting a specialised piece of equipment to the end of a terminal device enable you to do your job? For example, there are prosthetic attachments available which will allow you to hold a hammer, use a screwdriver, carry items, hold a camera, push a lawnmower or use a garden trimmer. The list of adaptive devices is endless and usually your prosthetic provider can create the right device for you.

Lower limb

If you are a lower limb amputee there are several different feet and knees which will support you in the workplace. For example, waterproof prosthetic limbs if you work in wet environments, heavy duty limbs which can provide support in industrial settings, and anti-stumble knee units to provide additional stability and balance.

Career Pathways and Planning

Sometimes people are unable to return to their place of employment and/or are unable to continue in the role they held previously after their amputation. If that's the case, and there are no other alternative opportunities in your current workplace, how do you find a new job that is right for you?

Having a disability does mean that some areas of your life will be different than they were before. Some people find that they are not as physically active as they used to be, are unable to stand for lengthy periods of time, or may not be able to operate the machinery used previously. If that's the case for you, you may need to consider what's next for you and how do you go about finding a new career path.

Checklists

Sometimes it's helpful to use a checklist to determine what is important to you. It may also help you to identify skills that you didn't realise that you had.



- ☐ Spending time with family
- ☐ Spending time with friends
- ☐ Having time to travel
- ☐ Having time to relax
- ☐ Not travelling too far to work
- ☐ Feeling respected
- ☐ Being financially stable
- ☐ Having nice things
- ☐ Going to nice places
- ☐ Giving your children a good education
- ☐ Feeling satisfied that you have put in a good day's work
- ☐ Having colleagues that you can work with
- ☐ Working as part of a team environment

These are just a few things to consider when thinking about your career pathway. But don't forget you can create your own checklist which includes all the things that are important to you when career planning.

Skills you enjoy using

We all have skills. Skills can be gained in various ways - life experience, volunteer activities, paid or unpaid work, education, training etc. Think about the things that you are good at and what you enjoy doing?

When searching for a job it is important to understand the employer's needs and how your skills can match those.

Natural skills are the things that generally come easy to you and that you are good at. You may find that you don't recognise them as skills, or take them for granted, because they are easy for you. Natural abilities and capabilities are great skills that you can use in everyday life and in some jobs. The following exercise can help you to discover and identify your skills:

Worksheet

Make sure that you identify your skills, not fields of expertise. A skill is an action. For example, organising people is a skill, whereas physiotherapy is a field of expertise. Answer the questions and write down 4 - 8 natural skills that come to mind. Only include the skills that you enjoy.

What tasks are naturally easy for you?

What things can you do better and easier than others?

What are you known for amongst your family or friends?

What are your hobbies?

How would a family member or close friend describe you?

Use your skills to identify new job opportunities

Now that you have identified your skills and made a list of the things that you are good at, think about how these skills could be transferred or used in the workplace. Write down all the possible careers and jobs where your skills would be beneficial to an employer. You might like to do this task with a family member, friend or with your Job Motivating Mentor. You might also want to do it on your own. Use the list you created to identify new careers, jobs and roles that might be right for you!





Limbs 4 Life™
Empowering Amputees



Government of Western Australia
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