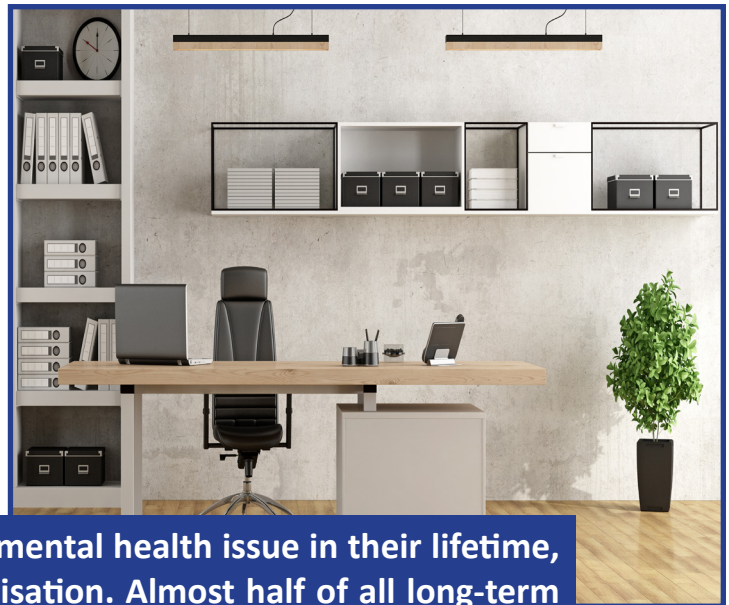


Returning to work after a mental health break



One in four people will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime, according to the World Health Organisation. Almost half of all long-term absences at work are as a result of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder, so it's important to know what to do if you or a colleague is returning to work after a mental health break.

What you need to know if you are returning from a mental health break

- **Telling your employer.** It is your legal right to keep your condition private, but it can add stress to an already stressful situation if your employers don't know what you are going through. Having a word with your manager and HR department can help them work with you to find an approach that works for both of you. Depending on your organisation, they may be willing to offer flexi-time, job sharing, part-time work or even offer to reduce your workload for a period.
- **Returning to work when you're ready.** It's important not to place unrealistic demands on yourself when you re-enter the workplace. Some days will be better than others. Give yourself time to recover and remember that you are not alone, there are people that are going through the same thing, and that it is a transient thing. Take it day by day and work with a support group, counsellor, your employee assistance advisor, and your manager if possible, on how best to proceed.
- **Know that your colleague might not be 100% themselves in the beginning.** They are affected with a medical condition that affects their performance and concentration negatively, and added unnecessary stress could worsen their capabilities and possibly even set their recovery process back.
- **You can ask for help too.** As their colleague or manager, you don't have to have all the answers. If someone is feeling overwhelmed and emotional, you can take them to a quiet spot and call an employee wellness counsellor to help you handle the situation.
- **Ask your colleague or employee about what they may need from you and what they realistically can manage.** This can help you both to set realistic expectations. A good idea is to speak to your occupational health/HR manager or employee wellness advisor for advice on the best way to manage the situation.

It's important to keep the dialogue open and to touch base regularly to see what is or isn't working and find a workable solution that helps both parties. Keep the conversation positive and solutions-orientated, while showing empathy and kindness whenever you can.

What you as colleagues and managers need to know