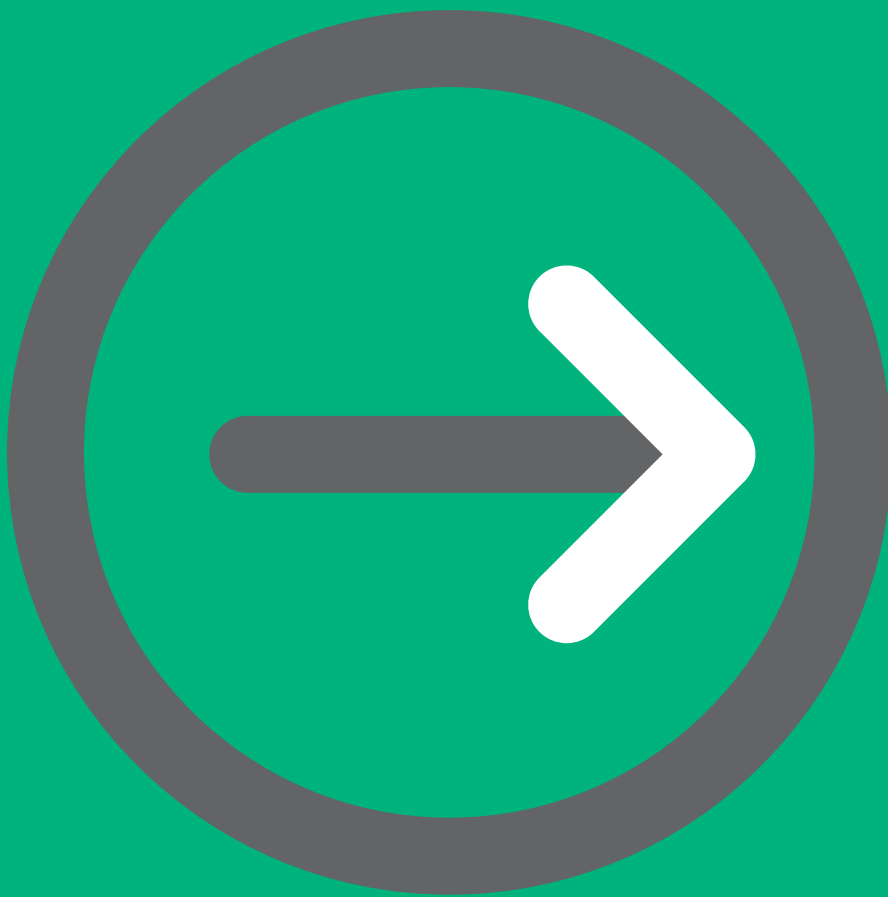




Department
for Work &
Pensions

Fit for Work

Guidance for employees



For details on when referrals to the Fit for Work assessment can be made in your area please visit: www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-for-work-guidance

Fit for Work – summary guidance for employees

Fit for Work helps you to manage your health conditions and/or sickness absence through an advice service and a referral to an assessment service for work related health advice.

Advice: Fit for Work can give you advice for all work-related health matters via a website and telephone line.

Referral for an occupational health assessment: Fit for Work will also provide you with an opportunity to be referred for individually tailored advice from an occupational health professional if you are or are likely to be off sick from work for four weeks or more. Once referred, this health professional will talk to you about your health, assess your circumstances and create a plan with your agreement providing recommendations to help you back into work (this is a Return to Work Plan).

Fit for Work is:

- **Free** – accessing advice and assessments are free for you, your employer and your GP
- **Quick** – you can access advice from Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm in England and Wales and Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm in Scotland. A referral for an assessment can be made via web or telephone. Once a referral for an assessment is being made you will be contacted by a health professional within 2 working days
- **Supportive** – you can choose to be referred for a Fit for Work assessment through your GP. If you live in England and Wales visit www.fitforwork.org to see where the service is currently live and where it will be rolling out. If you live in Scotland visit www.fitforworkscotland.scot to find out what is available and how to get in touch. You can choose to be referred by your employer from Autumn 2015 in England and Wales and Spring 2015 in Scotland Fit for Work will provide you with a plan, agreed by you and the occupational health professional, which will also be shared with your employer and GP to help support you back into work with your consent.

Your employer can accept the Return to Work Plan as evidence of sickness absence in exactly the same way as a fit note so you will not have to return to your GP for additional fit notes.

What will happen if you are referred to Fit for Work for an occupational health assessment?

Your GP will discuss a referral to Fit for Work, usually as part of a discussion about a fit note. You will be asked to consent to this referral. From Autumn 2015 in England and Wales and Spring 2015 in Scotland your employer may also discuss referring you to Fit for Work if after four weeks absence your GP has not made a referral.



An occupational health professional will contact you within two working days of receiving a referral to conduct an assessment.



The occupational health professional will work with you to create a plan which details your condition and the type of support you may require in order to return to work.



With your consent, this plan may be shared with your employer and GP to consider carrying out recommendations

More information

England and Wales:

www.fitforwork.org

0800 032 6235

Welsh Language Line:

www.fitforwork.org

0800 032 6233

Scotland:

www.fitforworkscotland.scot

0800 019 2211

A detailed guide to Fit for Work for employees

We have developed this guide to help you make best use of Fit for Work to support you to return to work as quickly as appropriate.

About this Guide

This guide gives you information on Fit for Work:

- What is Fit for Work?
- Why has Fit for Work being introduced?
- Who is providing Fit for Work?
- How will Fit for Work help me?
- Am I eligible for a Fit for Work assessment?
- How do I access Fit for Work?
- What will happen once I have been referred to a Fit for Work assessment?
- Frequently Asked Questions

This guidance has been developed in conjunction with practising doctors, professional bodies and employer and employee representative groups. The guidance has also been developed in conjunction with ACAS.

What is Fit for Work?

Fit for Work has two elements:

Advice: You can access advice from an occupational health professional on line or through a phone service. The advice line will:

- provide you with work-related health advice based on your personal circumstances
- help you identify any issues with your health which are affecting you at work or from returning to work
- offer solutions to support your health at work and with returning to work if you are off sick
- signpost you to relevant sources of support through self help, other experts and other services or providers

Referral for an occupational health assessment: 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 your GP for an assessment by Fit for Work. Your employer may also discuss making a referral with you after employer referrals go live in Autumn 2015 in England and Wales and Spring 2015 in Scotland. If you have been absent from work for four weeks or more and your GP has not made a referral, your employer can also refer you for a Fit for Work assessment. You will be asked to provide consent before being referred to Fit for Work by your GP or your employer.

The purpose of the assessment service is to give you, your employer and your GP advice and recommendations to assist your return to work more quickly.

A Return to Work Plan will be provided with advice and recommendations that you have discussed and agreed with your Fit for Work case manager. Your case manager will be medically qualified and have an occupational health qualification or experience of occupational health.

Your Return to Work Plan will only be shared with your GP and your employer with your consent. Your Return to Work Plan will be sent to you, your GP and employer via email or will be accessible via a web link. Where appropriate your Return to Work Plan may be sent by post.

How does the assessment work?

- Your assessment will be conducted by a health professional who will take account of the full range of issues, including health, work, home and any other difficulties that could be preventing a return to work
- Most assessments will be carried out by telephone but, if necessary, a face-to-face meeting will be arranged with you. Fit for Work will explore other ways to conduct an assessment if you are unable to travel to a face to face assessment
- Fit for Work will contact you to conduct an assessment at a convenient time for you (within two working days of receipt of referral or five working days for face to face assessment)

- If any further assessments are necessary, they will be carried out within two working days of the need being identified
- Fit for Work will pay reasonable travel expenses for a face to face assessment. Please speak to the health professional at the time of your assessment booking or at your assessment itself for further details about making a claim

Return to Work Plan: the plan will reflect the assessment. It will include advice, recommendations for interventions and signposting to other help for you, your employer and your GP, if necessary. The plan will also include a timetable for progressing interventions and for returning to work if appropriate.

A Return to Work Plan provides evidence of sickness absence in exactly the same way as a fit note issued by your GP. The plan may indicate that you are 'not fit for work' or 'may be fit for work' subject to your employer being able to carry out the recommendations. Alternatively, your plan may say that you are fit for work.

Why is Fit for Work being introduced?

Employees – in a response to a survey a group of employees agreed that work is good for both mental and physical health and they would like to ask their current employer to take steps so that they could carry on working¹.

GPs – have said they would like more help with occupational health advice.

Employers – want more help and advice to support employees to return to work, especially in the case of employers who have limited or no access to an employer provided occupational health service.

Fit for Work will provide work-related health advice and support for employees, employers and GPs to help individuals with a health condition to stay in or return to work after a period of sickness absence.

Who is providing Fit for Work?

In England and Wales Fit for Work is being delivered by Health Management Limited. In Scotland, Fit for Work Scotland is being delivered by the Scottish Government via NHS Scotland.

Fit for Work

Fit for Work
Scotland

¹ Collingwood, S. (2011). Attitudes to health and work amongst the working age population. DWP Research Report No 763. Available at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2011-2012/rrep763.pdf>

How can Fit for Work help me?

Being absent from work has an impact on you– it affects your health, employment and financial well-being. It also affects your employer and your GP.

Acting quickly when you are struggling with a health condition at work or off sick from work is important. The longer you are off work the harder it is for you to return to any type of employment. The evidence suggests that once you have been off for four weeks you may be at greater risk of not returning to work.

Being out of work for four weeks or more can impact on your mental as well as physical health, even if the original reason for your ill health was a physical one.

There is also evidence to suggest if someone is off long term it can impact on their family and their health as well.

Fit for Work will help doctors benefit from specialist advice, employers who need advice to support their employees to return to work and most importantly help patients return to or remain in work and aid their recovery.

Fit for Work will provide you with advice from an independent health professional in addition to support available from your GP and employer. Fit for Work also supports your employer occupational health services, if your employer provides such services.

From 1st January 2015 a new tax exemption will apply where your employer pays for medical treatment for you recommended by a healthcare professional as part of either Fit for Work or any employer-arranged occupational health service. The medical treatment must be recommended to help you return to work after a period of absence due to ill health or injury and either:

- a healthcare professional has assessed you as not fit for work or may be fit for work for at least 28 consecutive days, due to ill health or injury; or
- you have been absent from work for at least 28 consecutive days due to ill health or injury.

A healthcare professional is a registered medical practitioner, a registered nurse, or an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or psychologist registered with an appropriate regulatory body.

The exemption applies to expenditure up to a cap of £500 per employee per tax year. A tax year runs from 6 April in one year to 5 April in the next.

For further information on tax exemptions please see 'Frequently Asked Questions for Employees'.

Am I eligible for a Fit for Work assessment?

Your GP can refer you for a Fit for Work assessment when you have been off or if they think you are likely to be off sick from work for four weeks.

Before a referral is made you will be asked for your consent. From Autumn 2015 in England and Wales and Spring 2015 in Scotland your employer can also refer you to Fit for Work for an assessment, if your GP has not done so after you have been sick for four weeks. Any referral is subject to you providing consent.

You will be eligible for Fit for Work if you:

- live in England, Wales and Scotland;
- are of any age in paid employment;
- are referred by your GP or employer;
- have been off sick for four weeks or more, or your GP thinks you could be off sick for this long;
- are likely to be able to return to work;
- have not been previously referred to the service within the last 12 months and have not had a Return to Work Plan; and
- have consented to a referral

You will not be eligible for the assessment part of Fit for Work if you:

- live outside England, Wales and Scotland;
- are not off sick from work;
- are not referred by your GP or employer (i.e. self-referrals);
- are self-employed;
- are unlikely to be able to return to work;
- have been re-referred within a 12 month period of a previous referral and have had a Return to Work Plan;
- are not in paid employment; and / or
- do not consent to a referral

How do I access Fit for Work?

You can access Fit for Work advice by using the following web links and telephone numbers below:

England and Wales

- www.fitforwork.org
- 0800 032 6235
- Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

Welsh Language Line

- www.fitforwork.org
- 0800 032 6233
- Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

Scotland

- www.fitforworkscotland.scot
- 0800 019 2211
- Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

To access a Fit for Work assessment please speak to your GP or your employer.

What will happen once I have been referred to a Fit for Work assessment?

Fit for Work will contact you to conduct a telephone assessment at a convenient time for you, within two working days of receipt of referral or five working days for a face to face assessment if it is deemed appropriate.

The assessment is carried out by health professionals who will manage your case through to the end of the process and are the single point of contact for you. The health professional will ask you to confirm some basic information in order to verify your identity. They will also obtain your consent to taking part in the assessment and for your personal information to be processed for that purpose.

During the assessment, the health professional will ask you to describe your condition, your job role and any factors - whether in relation to health, work, home or any other issues – that are affecting your return to work.

Following the assessment, your case manager will develop and discuss your Return to Work Plan which will provide details of the supportive actions which will help you back to work. These supportive actions are recommendations and it is up to you, your GP and your employer to consider whether and how to take these recommendations forward.

The occupational health professional will share the Return to Work Plan with you, your GP and your employer subject to your consent. The Return to Work Plan will be sent via email or post where appropriate.

You can provide your Return to Work Plan to your employer to be used in place of a fit note as evidence of fitness for work.

After you have received your Return to Work Plan, your case manager will contact you at an arranged point to check if your plan is on course. They will also contact you shortly after the anticipated return to work date. If necessary, your case manager will arrange for you to have another assessment by Fit for Work, for example if you have not returned to work as anticipated. The Return to Work Plan may also be revised to reflect any changes that are necessary.

You will automatically be discharged from Fit for Work when you return to work or have begun a phased return to work or if your case manager decides Fit for Work is no longer appropriate for you.

After you have been discharged from Fit for Work you will be invited to provide feedback about the service.

For further information please access:

- Frequently Asked Questions for Employees (page 14)
- England and Wales: www.fitforwork.org
- Scotland: www.fitforworkscotland.scot

Frequently asked questions for employees

This section is split into the following categories:

- (a) Providers
- (b) Referrals and Eligibility
- (c) Consent and Data Protection
- (d) Employer involvement
- (e) Return to Work Plans
- (f) GPs involvement
- (g) Further Information

Providers

Who is providing Fit for Work?

In England and Wales Fit for Work is being delivered by Health Management Limited. In Scotland, Fit for Work Scotland is being delivered by the Scottish Government via NHS Scotland.

What qualifications will the health professional have?

Fit for Work is delivered by registered occupational healthcare professionals who have occupational health qualifications; have occupational health experience; or are able to demonstrate experience and skills appropriate to working in an occupational health context. Their expertise will ensure that Fit for Work will identify the full range of issues preventing a return to work and provide appropriate advice in line with best practice.

Occupational health professionals delivering Fit for Work will be appropriately supervised and it will be under the overall direction of an accredited specialist in Occupational Medicine.

Training will be provided to all occupational health professionals delivering Fit for Work.

What is a case manager?

A case manager is an occupational health professional who will be an employee's point of contact throughout Fit for Work. This is the same person who will contact your employer if they feel it is appropriate to do so and if you have consented for them to contact them. They will also be your contact for any discussions over recommendations contained within the Return to Work Plan and discussions about how you are getting on with the actions recommended in the plan.

Will the provider pay travel expenses for an assessment?

You will need to speak to your case manager at the time of arranging an assessment for further details on how to claim reasonable travel expenses.

How far will I have to travel for a face to face assessment?

Assessments will normally be conducted by phone, but if you need a face to face assessment they will take place within 90 minutes travelling time by public transport from your home address.

Referrals and Eligibility

When might a referral for an assessment be necessary for me?

When you have reached four weeks absence or your GP thinks you could be sick for four weeks and you are likely to be able to return to work.

Does self certification of sickness absence count towards four weeks sickness absence under Fit for Work?

Yes, self certification of sickness absence will count towards 4 weeks of sickness absence for the purposes of Fit for Work eligibility requirements.

Am I eligible for Fit for Work?

If you are an employee who has been off work for four weeks or are likely to be off for four weeks or more, and with further help you have a reasonable prospect of a return to work, you are eligible for a referral.

You will be eligible for Fit for Work if you:

- live in England, Wales and Scotland;
- are of any age in paid employment;
- have been referred by your GP or employer;
- are or are likely to be absent from work for four weeks or more;
- can return to work;
- have not been previously referred to the service within the last 12 months and have not received a Return to Work Plan; and
- have consented to a referral

When might a referral for an assessment not be necessary for me?

You will not be eligible for the assessment part of Fit for Work if you:

- do not live in England, Wales and Scotland;
- have returned to work;
- have not been referred by your GP or employer (i.e. self-referrals are not allowed);
- are self-employed;
- are unlikely to return to work;
- have been re-referred within a 12 month period of a previous referral and have had a Return to Work Plan;
- are not in paid employment; and / or
- have not consented to a referral

Can I access all parts of Fit for Work?

Advice Line – anybody can access the advice line whether they are an employee, employer, GP or any other individual.

Assessment – your GP can refer you in the first instance. Where your GP has not made a referral and you have reached or exceeded four weeks sickness absence, from Autumn 2015 in England and Wales and Spring 2015 in Scotland your employer may make a referral.

Can I be referred if I have been sick earlier or later than four weeks?

A referral can be made earlier or later than four weeks if your GP thinks:

- you will be absent for four weeks and this earlier referral may help shorten your sickness absence
- a referral may not be appropriate at four weeks, but could be suitable at six weeks (e.g. after your recovery from hip replacement surgery)

Your GP will always exercise their professional judgement about the clinical appropriateness of a referral.

Once employer referrals go live your employer can only make a referral after you have been sick for four weeks.

Can I be referred to a Fit for Work assessment if I am nearing State Pension age?

Yes, where you meet the Fit for Work criteria you may be referred regardless of age.

Why should I consent to a Fit for Work assessment?

You have the option of receiving free professional and independent advice for many issues including:

- What adjustments are needed to support you
- How to interpret your Return to Work Plan (a plan with recommendations to support you to return to work)
- How your employer and / or GP can support you back to work
- What you can do to support yourself to return to work
- How to prevent another period of sickness absence occurring

What happens if I do not consent to a Fit for Work referral for an assessment?

If you do not consent, your GP and / or employer should not refer you for an assessment.

Is it mandatory for my GP and / or employer to refer me to Fit for Work?

In all cases making a referral is considered the default position. However Fit for Work is not mandatory as you will need to provide consent to be referred.

Is it mandatory for me to engage with Fit for Work?

In all cases making a referral is considered the default position. However Fit for Work is not mandatory as you will need to provide consent.

How often can I be referred to Fit for Work?

You can access the advice line via web or telephone as many times as you require.

There is no limit to the number of eligible individuals that can be referred, but an individual can only be referred for one assessment in a 12 month period.

What if I am self employed, unemployed, experiencing long term sickness absence or am experiencing short spells of sickness absence?

If you fall into one of the above groups you will be able to access the advice service, but not the assessment service. All individuals whatever their circumstances will be eligible to access the advice service.

What happens if my circumstances change during the referral process e.g. I develop a further health condition - am made redundant etc?

If there is a change in your health condition this should be addressed by your GP. If there is a change in relation to any factor, Fit for Work may revise your Return to Work Plan to take account of new information and will consider whether discharge from the service is appropriate, if no further support is available.

Can my consultant make a referral instead of my GP?

No, only your GP can make a referral to Fit for Work. Your GP is more likely to have an overall picture of your health conditions and issues that may impact a return to work.

Can Fit for Work support me if I have a specialist condition?

Fit for Work uses an approach, which takes into account the full range of work, health, home and any other issues that are preventing a return to work. This applies to all health conditions. In addition, the service will have access to professionals with appropriate competencies in musculoskeletal and mental health conditions. They can identify the full range of obstacles preventing a return to work, and provide appropriate advice.

Can I be referred to Fit for Work for a long term or fluctuating condition e.g. cancer?

Yes you can be referred for a long term or fluctuating condition if you meet the eligibility criteria.

What will happen if I can't travel for a face to face assessment?

Fit for Work will take into account situations where you are unable to travel to a face to face assessment. Alternative arrangements will be considered.

Where can I find more information about being referred to a Fit for Work assessment?

England and Wales: www.fitforwork.org

Scotland: www.fitforworkscotland.scot

Consent and Data Protection

What happens if I do not provide consent to a Fit for Work referral, assessment or to sharing the Return to Work Plan?

A referral to Fit for Work will not be made, an assessment will not be conducted and a Return to Work Plan will not be shared with you, your employer and your GP if you do not provide consent.

Your consent must be explicit, informed, specific and freely given and must be given at different parts of the process:

- Before your GP and employer make a referral to Fit for Work, before the initial assessment takes place (or later if you wish to share any additional personal information about yourself with Fit for Work)
- When you are first contacted by Fit for Work following referral
- Before any version of the Return to Work Plan is shared (e.g. with you, your GP or your employer)
- Before Fit for Work contacts your GP or employer or any third party if this is necessary as part of the assessment or follow up
- Before your GP or employer make contact with each other for the purpose of Fit for Work

We believe the potential benefits will mean all parties will want to engage with Fit for Work, and will actively manage sickness absence by following the advice in the Return to Work Plan.

How are you protecting my data?

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Health Management Ltd are joint data controllers of personal information processed by Fit for Work in England and Wales, for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. In practice, Health Management Limited will have the primary responsibility for day to day DPA compliance in relation to personal information processed by Fit for Work in England and Wales.

DWP, Scottish Government, and Providers of Fit for Work are joint Data controllers in relation to personal data which is processed by Fit for Work in Scotland, for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. In practice the Providers will have primary responsibility for day to day DPA compliance in relation to personal information processed by Fit for Work in Scotland.

Health Management Limited and providers in Scotland have put into effect and will maintain security measures and safeguards appropriate to the nature and use of the information throughout their supply chains.

Employer involvement

How will employers be involved?

Employers are involved by:

- Making referrals to Fit for Work (This applies from Autumn 2015 in England and Wales and from Spring 2015 in Scotland)
- Being contacted by Fit for Work as part of the assessment if the employee consents and information is required to develop the Return to Work Plan
- Taking into consideration recommendations provided on a Return to Work Plan

Will my employer need to consult my GP when making a referral?

No. It may be helpful for you to inform your employer if you have been referred to Fit for Work by your GP but there is no need for your employer to contact your GP directly. If Fit for Work receives duplicate referrals, the cases will be combined.

What if my employer does not act on recommendations?

Decisions on whether to progress interventions recommended in a Return to Work Plan following an assessment lies with you, your employer and your GP. It is not mandatory to progress the interventions recommended by Fit for Work, unless this is required to meet employers obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

Employers will continue to have responsibility for managing absences so it will be the responsibility of employers to decide if the interventions/ adjustments are reasonable and affordable.

However, we would encourage all parties to actively manage sickness absence and to act on the recommendations of Fit for Work as there are benefits to employers and employees of reducing sickness absence.

We also hope that the Government's tax exemption will encourage employers to fund any medical interventions that may be recommended by a Return to Work Plan.

Also, where you meet the criteria for **Access to Work**, your employer can apply for support from the programme, such as specialist aids and equipment or support workers. For further information see GOV.UK - Access to Work.

You can always discuss your progress with your Return to Work Plan with your case manager. With your consent, your case manager can also speak to your employer if there are any work-place issues affecting your return to work.

What if my employer makes consent a condition of my remaining on sick leave?

A referral to Fit for Work requires your consent. If you are experiencing problems at work you can seek further advice from your Union, Citizens Advice or Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

What are the tax implications if my employer pays for a health intervention recommended by Fit for Work?

From 1st January 2015 a new tax exemption will apply where your employer pays for medical treatment recommended by a healthcare professional as part of either Fit for Work or any employer-arranged occupational health service. The medical treatment must be recommended to help you return to work after a period of absence due to ill health or injury and either:

- a healthcare professional has assessed you as not fit for work or may be fit for work for at least 28 consecutive days, due to ill health or injury; or
- you have been absent from work for at least 28 consecutive days due to ill health or injury.
- A healthcare professional is a registered medical practitioner, a registered nurse, or an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or psychologist registered with an appropriate regulatory body.

The exemption applies to expenditure up to a cap of £500 per employee per tax year. A tax year runs from 6 April in one year to 5 April in the next.

Under existing tax rules, where your employer pays for medical treatment for you, the cost is likely to be liable to tax as either a benefit in kind or a payment of earnings. Employer and employee National Insurance contributions (NICs) may also be due. Once the tax exemption comes into effect your employer will still pay the full cost of any qualifying treatment, but there will be no charge to income tax or NICs on payments up to the limit of £500 per employee per tax year. The exemption will apply whether your employer arranges and pays for recommended treatment for you, pays for recommended treatment you have arranged yourself, or reimburses you for the costs of any recommended treatment. Any payments over the £500 limit will be chargeable to tax and National Insurance Contributions on any excess.

Where can I get further support from?

If you meet the criteria for Access to Work, your employer can apply for support, such as specialist aids and equipment or support workers. For further information see GOV.UK - Access to Work.

Further support with health and work matters can also be sought from your Union, Citizens Advice or Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

How does Fit for Work fit with my employer Occupational Health Services?

Fit for Work is intended to complement, and not replace, existing occupational health provision. Whilst Fit for Work will deliver some aspects of an occupational health service it will not deliver a fully comprehensive service. If you are receiving support from your employer's occupational health service that is providing sufficient help for you to return to work, it is important for you to share this information when a referral to Fit for Work is being made or with the Fit for Work

health professional once the referral has been made. Information will only be shared between Fit for Work and your employer occupational health service with your consent.

What is the difference between Fit for Work and employer occupational health?

The following differences apply:

	Employer Occupational Health	Fit for Work
Referral Routes	Employer and individual	GP and employer
Services	Employer driven and agreed	Sickness absence assessment
Point of Involvement	Employer driven and agreed	At four weeks
Frequency of Contact	Employer driven and agreed	Contact when required by your case manager
Workplace Knowledge	Good	Based on employee and employer information
Duration of Involvement	Employer driven and agreed	Three months compulsory discharge
Quantity of Involvement	Employer driven and agreed	One referral in a 12 month period

When deemed appropriate by your case manager and with your consent, employer occupational health services will be consulted during the formation of the Return to Work Plan and when discussing the recommendations within the finalised Plan.

What will happen if I am unable to return to work with any intervention?

Your employer will retain responsibility for managing your absence. As now it will be up to your employer to decide what steps to take if you are unable to engage with Fit for Work, or are unable to return to work when indicated on the Return to Work Plan.

Can I still request a fit note from my GP?

Where you have chosen to share your Return to Work Plan with your employer, the Plan in most circumstances should provide the information your employer needs to determine fitness for work for Statutory Sick Pay purposes. Employers should refrain from requesting fit notes in those circumstances, in order to prevent unnecessary consultations in GP practices.

You will need a fit note to cover the period between a referral being made and a Return to Work Plan being issued. A two week fit note would be sufficient to cover this period in most cases but there may be cases where a fit note is required for a longer period.

Once a Return to Work Plan has been issued this can be used in place of a fit note. GPs are not obliged to issue a fit note in these circumstances.

However where you do not consent to your Return to Work Plan being shared with your employer, or your employer does not accept a Return to Work Plan as sufficient evidence of incapacity to work, it may be necessary for your GP to provide you with a fit note. Your GP should use their professional judgement to decide whether a fit note is required.

How does Fit for Work affect my Statutory Sick Pay (SSP)?

A Return to Work Plan can be accepted by your employer as medical evidence of whether you are fit for work in place of a fit note for Statutory Sick Pay purposes. You should not need a fit note in addition to a Return to Work Plan where you have chosen to share your Return to Work Plan with your employer, although this may not happen in every case.

Fit for Work is not mandatory and a Return to Work Plan may not be prepared in every case and therefore a fit note can still be issued if it is required in your GPs clinical judgement.

Return to Work Plans

What is a Return to Work Plan?

This is a plan devised by an occupational health professional in agreement with you following a Fit for Work assessment. The plan will include steps and / or actions that can be taken by you, your GP or your employer to help support you to return to work as quickly as possible.

A Return to Work Plan may be accepted by your employer as sufficient medical information for the purposes of determining your entitlement to Statutory Sick Pay. Your Return to Work Plan may therefore be provided to your employer in place of a fit note. A Return to Work Plan will be sent to you, your employer and your GP via email (or post where appropriate). Where your GP or employer have made the actual referral to Fit for Work, they can access your Return to Work Plan via a web link, subject to your consent.

Can Return to Work Plans be used instead of fit notes for benefit purposes?

Return to Work Plans can be accepted in place of a fit note for benefit purposes. The length of time the Return to Work Plan will cover will be stated on the Return to Work Plan. Where a patient is not fit for work within the estimated timescales their case manager from Fit for Work will consider whether a further assessment is required. They will also consider whether the Return to Work Plan needs to be revised and cover a longer period of absence. Where a patient is discharged from Fit for Work they may request a fit note. In this case GPs should consider whether a fit note is appropriate in line with fit note guidance.

What happens if my Return to Work Plan says I am fit for work?

The Return to Work Plan will indicate if you are 'not fit for work' or 'may be fit for work' subject to your employer being able to meet recommendations. If there is no indication of further periods of absence, you are fit to return to work.

Will my GP and Fit for Work take into account support I am receiving through my employer or employer occupational health services?

Your GP and Fit for Work can take into account support you are receiving through your employer and / or employer occupational health service. It is recommended that you discuss the support you are receiving at the time a referral is being made and / or at the time the assessment is taking place to avoid duplication of support.

Is it mandatory to follow recommendations on a Return to Work Plan?

It is not mandatory to progress the interventions recommended by Fit for Work. Decisions for progressing interventions rest with you, your employer and your GP depending on the nature of the recommendation. However, we would encourage all parties to act on the recommendations of Fit for Work.

What if I do not agree with the assessment and / or Return to Work Plan?

As above, it is not mandatory to progress the interventions recommended by Fit for Work. However, we would encourage you, your employer and your GP to act on the recommendations of Fit for Work.

You can withdraw consent at any point during the process. You can also request for specific parts of the Return to Work Plan to be removed prior to it being shared with your GP or your employer.

If you withdraw consent to your Return to Work Plan being shared with your employer or you withdraw from Fit for Work altogether, your employer will normally still require you to provide reasonable medical evidence of fitness to work if you do not return to work. Your employer will tell you what evidence they require in these circumstances.

Will anyone contact me after a Return to Work Plan has been given to me?

Yes, your case manager will tell you when they will contact you. This is likely to involve a check that you are on track with any actions in your Return to Work Plan and after your anticipated return to work date. When they contact you, your case manager will decide if you need any additional help to return to work, such as a further assessment.

What if my employer refuses to accept a Return to Work Plan instead of a fit note?

A Return to Work Plan can be accepted by your employer as medical evidence of whether you are fit for work in place of a fit note for Statutory Sick Pay purposes. You should not need a fit note in addition to a Return to Work Plan where you have chosen to share your Return to Work Plan with your employer, although this may not happen in every case.

Fit for Work is not mandatory and a Return to Work Plan may not be prepared in every case and therefore a fit note can still be issued if it is required in your GPs clinical judgement.

GP involvement

Will my GP be able to contact Fit for Work and speak to my case manager?

Yes, if you have provided consent (see Consent and Data Protection FAQ above).

Further Information

How will Fit for Work deal with dispute issues at work?

Disputes at work may be considered as a complex case. This will be dealt with on an individual basis taking all circumstances into account. Support will be provided through progressing the difficulty together with appropriate signposting to appropriate agencies e.g. mediation.

What if I am not eligible or suitable for a Fit for Work assessment but need health and work advice and support?

You can use the advice service for Fit for Work. This can be accessed via web or telephone.

Does Fit for Work replace NHS provision?

Fit for Work does not replace any NHS provision.

How will Fit for Work link in with access to work?

Occupational health professionals conducting assessments may recommend contacting Access to Work if they consider it is appropriate for an individual. This may form part of the Return to Work Plan.

How does Fit for Work collect feedback?

You will be invited to provide feedback on the service provided by Fit for Work following completion of the Fit for Work process. This will take the form of a questionnaire conducted via email or telephone. This will help support continuous improvement and evaluation of the assessment service.

How do I provide feedback or make a complaint?

You can make a complaint by calling:

England and Wales:

0800 032 6235

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

Welsh Language Line:

0800 032 6233

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

Scotland:

0800 019 2211

Opening hours: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

What are the opening hours for Fit for Work?

England and Wales:

Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

Welsh Language Line:

Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6.00pm

Scotland:

Opening hours advice: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 5.00pm

Opening hours assessment: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 8.00pm

What other sources of help is there to help support me with my health condition and to return to or look for work?

Impartial Employment Advice

Acas: www.acas.org.uk

Or 0300 123 1100

Careers Advice

England: www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/Pages/default.aspx

Scotland: www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk

Wales: www.careerswales.com

Access to Work

www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview

Universal Jobmatch

www.gov.uk/jobsearch

You can seek further advice and support from your local union representative and / or health and safety representative.

Where can I find more information about sickness absence?

Information about managing sickness absence is available from a number of sources including the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), paid-for occupational health services, in Scotland 'Healthy Working Lives', in Wales 'Healthy Working Wales' and more generally, at the Government website, Gov.UK which also includes advice on job search through Universal Jobmatch.

You can also use the Fit for Work advice line and website:

England and Wales:

www.fitforwork.org

0800 032 6235

Welsh Language Line:

www.fitforwork.org

0800 032 6233

Scotland:

www.fitforworkscotland.scot

0800 019 2211



Department
for Work &
Pensions