

Getting back to work **after** **your absence**

How your reintegration
process works

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If you are (already) out of work due to illness or an accident, you will probably have questions about your **possible return to work**:

- What are my options and whom do I contact for help?
- Must I be fully recovered in order to return to work?
- Can my employer dismiss me or just force me to return?

Be aware that you are not alone with your concerns. You may contact your occupational doctor, your manager or a confidential counsellor at any time for answers to your questions and support during your **reintegration**.

What does reintegration mean? Together, we look at **how you can resume your work in the best possible way** after you have been absent due to health problems.

Did you know that getting back to work is **often good for your recovery**?
You feel useful, more confident and that you are part of a group...

There is a 'but': your return must be done at the right time and in the right way. The **reintegration process** helps you pick up your work again under the best possible conditions.

A new reintegration process has been in place since 1 January 2026.

In this brochure, you will find:

- The five steps of the reintegration process¹
- An overview of useful information websites

¹ The details of the new reintegration process can be found in Article I.4-VI. of the Codex for Wellbeing at Work.

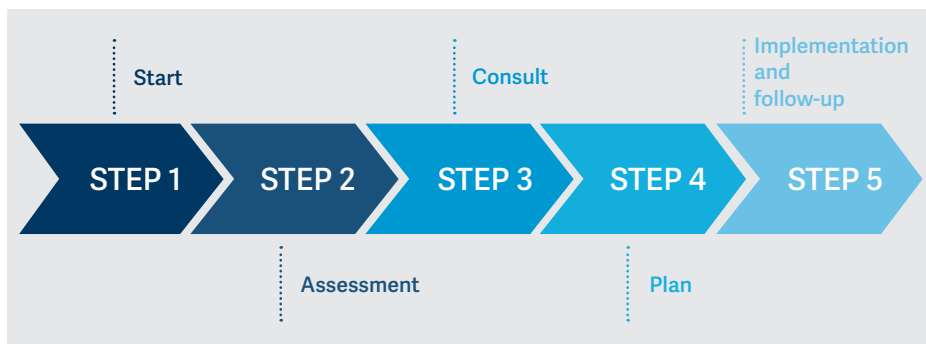
Five steps to getting back to work

The sooner you receive support, the greater the chance that you will be able to return to work under optimal conditions. You do not have to wait until the occupational doctor contacts you. Feel free to ask your employer about the options for adapted work, which is possible even if you are not yet unfit for work, but are at risk of going off sick due to health problems. You should **focus on what you are able to do** rather than on what you cannot (yet) do.

If you prefer to wait, the occupational doctor will inform you of the options for reintegration after a few weeks of absence. Remember that the occupational doctor is there to **help, advise and guide you** in your recovery.

After eight weeks of incapacity for work, your employer may ask the occupational doctor to assess whether you still have employment potential. Employment potential is the presumed ability of an unfit employee to perform adapted or other work.

We will send you a questionnaire that the occupational doctor will use, alongside other tools, to assess the extent to which adapted or other work may be suitable.



STEP 1 Start

You may apply for reintegration yourself or leave the request to your employer:

- **You or your treating physician** complete the 'request for reintegration process' form. Download the document at www.idewe.be/en/download. We will then invite you to attend a reintegration assessment in Step 2. We will inform your employer and your health insurance fund's consulting physician.
- **Your employer** starts the reintegration process. The process can only be started with your consent or if you have employment potential (see above). IDEWE Group's customer service will inform you of this and invite you to an appointment with the occupational doctor by registered letter.

If you do not respond to the invitation, a second and, if necessary, a third invitation will follow, with 14 days in between each one. If you then fail to accept these invitations, your health insurance fund's consulting physician will be informed of your lack of response. You will then receive a third invitation. If you still fail to attend, the reintegration process will end, and both your employer and the consulting physician will be informed accordingly under a legal obligation to do so.

STEP 2

Assessment

The occupational doctor will discuss with you whether and how you can resume work, with particular attention to the state of your health. The occupational doctor will ask for your consent to contact your treating physician, the consulting physician, other prevention advisors, and persons who can contribute to a successful reintegration. At your request, the occupational doctor may also contact your employer.

The occupational doctor may examine your workstation to look for possible adjustments. Throughout the reintegration process, you may be **assisted by a representative** from the Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work or by a trade union representative.

The occupational doctor will examine the following questions:

- Can you resume your old tasks again in the long term, with adjustments if necessary?
- Are other changes advisable: other work (temporarily), an adapted workstation or gradually building up your working hours?

Tip: Bring your **medical reports**, examination results and other relevant documents to every appointment. The more information the occupational doctor has, the better they can assess your situation.



Record in the '**Back to work booklet**' everything related to your resumption of work: appointments, contact details, notes, etc. Consider the booklet as your helping hand.

See 'Useful resources', p. 10.

What happens after the assessment by your occupational doctor?

The occupational doctor will make a decision within 49 days of receiving your request:

- Decision A – You can **resume the agreed work** in due course. In the meantime, you can do other or adapted work.
- Decision B – You are permanently unfit to resume the agreed work. However, you can do **other or adapted work**.
- Decision C – A **reintegration process is not yet possible** for medical reasons. A new process may be started at the earliest three months after this decision, unless the occupational doctor has good reasons to deviate from this period.

For decisions A and B, the occupational doctor notes the **conditions and provisions** on the reintegration assessment form. The doctor will provide you and your employer with a copy of the form. We will also share the decision with your treating physician and the consulting physician with your consent. If the occupational doctor recommends decision C, your health insurance fund's consulting physician will be informed automatically.

Note: You can **appeal** against the occupational doctor's decision, but only if you are permanently unfit to resume your agreed work (**decision B**) and the appeal is lodged within 21 days of receiving the form.

How to appeal the decision:

- Send a **registered letter** to the competent doctor/social inspector of the Directorate General for Monitoring Wellbeing at Work. You can find the information on the back of your reintegration assessment form.
- Also send a registered letter to inform your employer that you are appealing the decision.

The doctor/social inspector will make a decision within 42 days of receiving the appeal. and will inform you and your employer of their decision accordingly.

STEP 3

Consultation

If the occupational health doctor decides that you can carry out adapted or other work **temporarily** (decision A) or **permanently** (decision B), discussions will then follow between you, your employer and the occupational doctor to find the best solution for you at work from now on. Sometimes other people also take part in these discussions, such as a specialised prevention advisor.

STEP 4

Plan

After the consultation, your employer will draw up your reintegration plan. The latter takes into account what you discussed during the consultation and the recommendations from the occupational doctor.

What is in such a plan?

- A description of the **adjustments to your workstation** and/or machines and other facilities. These may include wheelchair access, an adjustable desk or work table, a special computer for the visually impaired and so on.
- An explanation of the **adapted work**, such as other or changed tasks, a new distribution of tasks, fewer working hours (part-time instead of full-time), work sitting down instead of standing, etc.
- The **validity period** of the plan.

If you are going to carry out tasks that you did not do before, they will also be included in your reintegration plan, as will training or support in order to master your new or adapted work.

In the case of **decision A**, the reintegration plan will be drawn up **within 63 days**; in the case of **decision B** within **six months**. You have 14 days to sign the plan for agreement. If you do not agree, you must indicate the reasons for your refusal at the end of the plan. If you do not respond to your employer's request for you to sign the plan, you will receive a second invitation after 14 days. If you still fail to respond, the plan will be considered rejected.



Note: It sometimes turns out that drawing up a reintegration plan is **not feasible** for technical or practical reasons, for example. In that case, your employer will explain these reasons in a report. This report will then be sent to you and the occupational doctor within the same time limits as those that apply to the plan.

The occupational doctor will submit the plan or report to the consulting physician and add it to your health file. If the occupational doctor selects decision B and this does not lead to an accepted plan, you will be referred to regional employment services.

STEP 5 Implementation and follow-up

Even after you have returned to work, you can be sure of receiving support. The occupational doctor will monitor your situation and **invite you to discuss it if** necessary. If, after a while, the plan no longer suits your state of health, you may request a **consultation** with the occupational doctor.

Working helps your recovery

If your health (already) allows it, working is good for your recovery:

- You are once again part of a **group** as you are in contact with your colleagues.
- You feel useful because you have something to do, and you gain more **confidence**.
- You have **distractions**, a purpose and challenges.
- You get out and **move** more.
- You avoid financial worries: your **salary** is higher than your benefit.

Feel free to take the initiative yourself in order to start your reintegration process, or contact your occupational doctor at no obligation for a visit prior to resuming work. Alternatively, if you are still at work but are experiencing health problems that make your work more difficult, ask your employer about the options for adapted or other work on a temporary basis. You can also request a spontaneous consultation with your occupational doctor to discuss your options at any time.



Useful resources

Would you like to learn more about reintegration? See the following information and publications:

- There are many questions when it comes to reintegration. If you would like to have more control over your return to work, be sure to read our tips.
<https://www.idewe.be/en/offer/healthy-work/reintegration-process>
- Need help returning to work? Write down appointments and notes in the 'Back to work' pocket guide, which you can find in the 'Downloads' section on our website.
www.idewe.be/en/downloads



Still have questions? Feel free to contact IDEWE.

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Please get in touch – we will be happy to help you!

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