



Brain Tumour Australia Information

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Rehabilitation & Returning to Work

The Brain—Rehabilitation

After a brain tumour diagnosis it may be necessary to receive rehabilitation at a specialist centre to assess an individual's physical and/or cognitive capacity to function independently

This may require the services of a neuro-psychologist, speech pathologist and physiotherapist assessment

Rehabilitation services may also assist by formulating a structured return to work plan.

Ask for a referral to a social worker in the community, the hospital or at Centrelink to discuss your options.

Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service [CRS] Australia

Delivers vocational rehabilitation services to Australian citizens or residents who have an injury, disability or health condition

This service is free to people receiving income support payments from Centrelink.

They assist people who have a disability or injury to get a job or return to their job.

Call - 1800 277 277

For more information visit the CRS Website:
<http://www.crsaustralia.gov.au/>

For resources on Acquired Brain Injury [ABI]

<http://braininjury.org.au/portal/content/view/337/711/>

Some employers offer a **Return to Work** program
This allows for a structured, easing back into the work force

The Brain- Returning to Work

- There is no hard and fast rule about when to return to work or in fact if it is achievable short or long term.
- Some people are able to return to work but choose to postpone it to do other things.
- Others successfully return to a place of employment.
- Familiar patterns and habits may be comforting for some and confronting for others.
- Make the choice that is right for you and your family.
- Most people diagnosed with a brain tumour want to return to independence.
- They want to drive and they want to return to work, and many are successful in their endeavours.
- The sense of purpose, challenges, sense of achievement, socialising aspects, and financial incentives of a job can assist you move ahead on the road to survival.
- Many people make the mistake of going back to full-time work too quickly.
- The brain may need time to heal, which typically takes 18 to 24 months.

Deciding when to Return to Work

A decision to return to work should be based on capabilities and needs, the resources available to you, and your family and consultation with your general practitioner and treating specialist.

One of the most important aspects of a decision to return to work is physical well being and psychological ability. This will depend on a variety of factors:

- Tumour size and grade
- Tumour location
- Tumour type
- Treatment type (and intensity of treatment) you have received

Returning to work can be a trial and error experience. You can try to anticipate the different types of experiences you may face in your normal work environment and develop action plans and strategies to best manage any potential problems that you may identify.



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Returning to Work cont.

Deciding when to Return to Work cont.

Be mindful that the ability of a person diagnosed with a brain tumour patient in returning to the workplace after diagnosis and treatment varies dramatically.

While some people are able to return relatively quickly, with little or no loss in ability or performance, others cannot work at all, or can only manage a limited amount of their former roles or responsibilities.

Planning and Preparing for a Return to Work

Assess your ability to return to work:

- Give yourself time to recover physically and emotionally from your treatments.
- Visit allied health professionals who can conduct a series of tests to assess your ability to return to the workplace. These tests can monitor your emotional, physical and your cognitive ability to ensure a more successful return to work.
- If necessary seek cognitive retraining which is usually with the help of a neuro-psychologist. Allow time to undergo cognitive retraining to help you compensate for problems that the tumour has caused. This can improve concentration and communication skills.
- Contact a Rehabilitation Service for advice. They may be able to assist.

The Brain- Decide how and where you will work

- If returning to an old job, or accepting a new job be honest and up front about your needs and expectations.
- Make sure your employers/colleagues expectations of you are also realistic.
- Modify your responsibilities for an initial period if necessary.
- Think about returning on a part-time basis.
- Investigate the job-sharing situation or flexible hours.

Informing colleagues about your brain tumour

- A decision to openly discuss your condition is a difficult choice and an extremely personal one.
- Many people diagnosed with a brain tumour feel that their health is a private matter while others decide that letting their colleagues know about their brain tumour and treatment assists making the work environment easier.
- You may want to explore the best way to inform people about your brain tumour with a social worker, your

employer or work supervisor.

The Brain—Back at Work

Work may be more difficult

In order to minimise the potential for frustration and disappointment it is important to be aware of your own capabilities and limitations. One of the most difficult challenges to be faced is accepting the reality that work may be harder than it used to be. Frustration may occur when tasks that used to be easy become hard. Tackling new tasks can add to the sense of frustration and difficulty, because it may be extremely tiring, difficult or impossible to learn new skills.

- Maintain a slower more even pace by working a few days a week in order to assess your ability and energy level.
- Organise or reorganise the work environment to maximise performance. For instance:
 - ◇ Make lists or keep a diary to assist in remembering appointments, tasks, etc
 - ◇ Prepare checklists to keep track of the tasks you have finished and the tasks you have yet to complete.
 - ◇ Use cues such as colour-coded containers for specific items, charts with diagrams or pictures, or a timer/alarm clock to remind you about tasks.
 - ◇ Learn one task thoroughly before going onto the next one. Repetition assists with relearning.
 - ◇ Repeat instructions to the person issuing them. Write down instructions and clarify any points you are unsure of.
 - ◇ Prioritise work.
 - ◇ Seek assistance if tasks are difficult, new or appear strange.
 - ◇ Be aware of occupational health and safety requirements.
 - ◇ Investigate resources your place of employment has access to.
 - ◇ Look after your health and energy levels
 - ◇ If you are still using medications, monitor them on your energy and concentration levels.
 - ◇ Be aware that for some people alertness is often more acute in the mornings with fatigue occurring later in the afternoon/evening.



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Returning to Work cont.

The Brain—Back at Work cont.

Work may be more difficult

- ◇ For other people the mornings may be the most difficult and levels of function may be better in the afternoon. Once you become familiar with your pattern set your work schedule accordingly.
- ◇ Understand changes they may have occurred from your diagnosis and treatment and adapt accordingly.
- ◇ Allow ample time for breaks and meals.
- ◇ Obtain assistance from a colleague
- ◇ Develop less stressful work practices
- ◇ Set personal boundaries
- ◇ Don't attempt to work overtime or take on someone else's workload
- ◇ **Seek peer support:** Attending a support group can also be a good suggestion to hear from other people about how they and their families coped

If a Return to Work is Not Possible

- Investigate whether you are eligible for a benefit from Centrelink either on a temporary or permanent basis.
- You may be able to gain access to your Superannuation benefits.
- Consult Commonwealth Rehabilitation Services (CRS) or another rehabilitation agency about suitable re training programs.

The return to work should be planned, handled in stages and attempted with much thought and consultation.

Living, Caring & Working

Living with a life limiting illness, caring for someone with a life limiting illness or working with someone with a life limiting illness or their carer is complicated. Find out more about these crucial issues <http://www.livingcaringworking.com/> Nationally throughout Australia people with life limiting illnesses, their families, friends and carers may be employed. The website contains information on understanding the experiences of work colleagues and provides tips on creating a supportive work environment. The website also provides information for people living with a life threatening illness and their carers.

Care & Support

Nutrition and Diet

Whilst receiving treatment for a brain tumour and in the recovery phase it is essential to maintain a well-balanced nutritional intake. This will assist with:

- boosting the immune system
- promoting healing
- dealing with the various treatment regimes
- managing fatigue

Caregivers also must not be neglected in relation to their nutritional intake. To maintain energy and to combat stress it is essential to eat well, and consistently.

- Ask a member of your treatment team for a referral to a dietician or consult a dietician at the Cancer treatment Centre for free advice.
- While fresh fruit and vegetables, either as a meal, a snack or through juicing is a great way to start, some patients may need to check with their treatment team before embarking on this type of nutritional journey.

Because of the vast amount of information available, it can be confusing deciding what is best to eat.

Many factors influence what foods are best for an individual's needs including climate, physical activity, lifestyle, condition and age.

Often, it is not what we eat that is important so much as what we need to avoid.

Create a plan considering -

- What foods to avoid?
- What foods to eat more of?
- What supplements to take?
- Consider tolerance to taking pills, and the taste.
- Your budget.

Some useful information is available from USA National Institute of Health - offers great information/tips on nutrition while undergoing treatment for cancer. [Cancer.gov - Nutrition \(PDQ®\)](http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/eatinghints)

USA National Institute of Health Eating Hints for Cancer Patients: Before, During, and After Treatment <http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/eatinghints>