

## Managing back pain at work; how can your GP help?

Most people with back pain manage better if they remain at work or return to work quickly after sick leave. There are many benefits to this including the fact that you are less likely to have long term pain and disability or depression and you will remain much fitter. Many people turn to their GP or healthcare provider for reliable information about their health status. If you feel uncertain about what you can and cannot do at work as a result of your back pain it is recommended that you visit your GP or Occupational Health professional.

### Nicky

"I was sent to see an occupational health doctor through work. I was worried about how official this sounded and feared that the company were trying to write me off. He was more interested in the ways we could manage to get me back to my job rather than saying I couldn't do my job anymore."

### How can your GP help?

Speaking to your GP can help you understand more about your back pain and the different ways that you can manage it on a daily basis. They can assess whether you need further assessment or treatment for your back pain. Discussing how your back pain affects you at work with your GP can also help you feel more informed and confident about talking to your employer to discuss making changes that will help you manage in the workplace. Your GP can give you guidance on what you cannot do, and more importantly on what you can do. They will be in the best position to assess the extent to which your health condition affects your functioning.

### Questions about your back pain and work

Your GP may not be familiar with your specific tasks at work so it is important that you tell them about this. One option is to write down your key work activities and a description of how your back pain affects these, and take this with you to your appointment. If you go to your GP prepared in this way you'll find you can get much more out of a ten minute consultation than if you go unprepared.

You could ask your GP if there are any work tasks that you have included in your list that you should stop or avoid doing, and if so for how long. This information will help when you negotiate possible adaptations to your work with your employer.

If your work involves driving or using heavy machinery you will need to establish whether any medication you are offered to manage your back pain affects this. Everyone responds to drugs differently and if certain side effects are not manageable it may be possible to try a different medication.

### Other questions to ask your GP

- ◆ What are my treatment options? Are there any side effects or risks?
- ◆ How long will I need treatment for? How will I know if the treatment is working?
- ◆ What are the tests for?
- ◆ What happens next? Who do I contact if things get worse?
- ◆ Can I check that I've understood what you said? What you're saying is ..