

Using occupational health at work

Occupational health is a type of medical service for:

- supporting employees and employers
- helping wellbeing in the workplace

It can be used for both physical and mental health.

When occupational health can be used

When an employee is off sick for a long time or is returning from sickness absence, their employer might want to get occupational health advice.

This could be through their company's own occupational health service or an outside agency.

The occupational health adviser carries out an assessment of the employee and reports back to the employer.

This can help the employer understand what their employee needs to:

- feel better
- [return to work](#)
- do their job
- address any problems that could cause further health or absence issues

Example

An employee has had a back injury. Their employer asks an occupational health adviser to carry out an assessment. The assessment says that the employee needs their work chair adjusted. The employer arranges the adjustment. This helps the employee work comfortably and without making their injury worse.

The employee does not have to agree to an occupational health assessment, but it's a good idea as it can help them:

- get any support they might need
- get back to work quicker

Checking if your workplace uses occupational health

It's a good idea to check if your workplace has an occupational health policy.

This should say:

- when an occupational health referral or assessment can be made

- how, where and by who it's carried out
- what both the employer and employee need to do
- what the next steps are

Smaller organisations might not have an occupational health policy or scheme. In this case, the employer should take the advice of both the employee and the employee's doctor.

What happens in an occupational health assessment

The occupational health adviser might ask the employee about:

- their health problem
- any treatment they're having
- any concerns they have about returning to work

Sometimes the occupational health adviser might need to get more information from the employee's doctor. In this case, the employee should be told the reason and asked to sign a consent form.

The employee has the right to see the doctor's report before it is sent to the occupational health adviser.

Whether the employee gets paid for attending occupational health appointments is down to your workplace policy, so it's a good idea to check.

How an occupational health assessment is used

An occupational health assessment is a useful addition to a doctor's medical report because it's more focused on:

- how the employee does their job
- how the job might affect the employee's health

The employer should consider the recommendations of both the occupational health and doctor's reports.

If there is any conflicting advice, they should talk with their employee and come to an agreement on the best course of action.

The occupational health adviser will check with the employee first that they can show their report to the employer.

The employer and employee can then plan the best course of action to help the employee back to work.

They might agree that the employee needs:

- a phased [return to work](#), for example reduced working hours or lighter duties
- a referral for an appropriate course of therapy, for example

physiotherapy or counselling

- [adjustments](#) to their workspace, for example an ergonomic chair
- more time off work

Depending on the health issue, the employee's progress might need to be assessed again before a firm agreement can be made about their return to work or to full duties.

If an employee is unhappy with how occupational health has been used, they should [raise the issue with their employer](#).