



There are ways to promote smooth vocational rehabilitation at the workplace

The timing and continuity of vocational rehabilitation are critical factors for the success of rehabilitation. Our study showed that the earlier and more continuously rehabilitation is carried out, the better the chances of returning to work. Timely and individual support, a positive attitude towards rehabilitation at the workplace and in the work community, and smooth cooperation between different parties are crucial for the success of rehabilitation. It is important for the supervisor to understand what vocational rehabilitation means in practice and how they can support the employee during the work trial to achieve the best outcome.



Solutions for supervisors

Have an early discussion if you notice a decline in the employee's work ability, adjust the work tasks, make partial sick leave possible, if necessary, and make use of an occupational health care work trial. Keep in regular contact with the employee, even during a long sick leave. Also discuss the possibility of vocational rehabilitation in good time. Occupational health care cooperation and occupational health negotiations are important in finding the appropriate form of support and timing.

Clearly communicate workplace practices. Make sure that the employee knows whom to inform at the workplace after receiving the rehabilitation decision. It is also a good idea to provide information about the progress of the rehabilitation at the workplace.

Participate in planning rehabilitation. Prepare a plan on the necessary work arrangements and the implementation of the work trial together with the employee and occupational health care.

Promote a positive attitude towards partial work ability at the workplace. Agree with the employee how the work community will be informed of the employee's changed work arrangements and duties and how they affect the team's work. Monitor the rehabilitee's progress. Ask regularly about how the rehabilitee's work is going. This allows you to identify any challenges in time and agree on the necessary changes to the work tasks.

Take preventive action. Prepare in advance for any changes and planned or unexpected interruptions in rehabilitation. Discuss different options together with the employee and, if necessary, occupational health care act, and agree on further measures before the interruption begins.

Support the rehabilitee even after rehabilitation. Ask the employee regularly how their work tasks are going and show genuine interest in their situation even after the rehabilitation has ended.

Reacting early to work ability challenges at the workplace can prevent months of delay in starting rehabilitation.

54%

of rehabilitations started in less than four months

13%

of rehabilitations included at least one break

6%

of rehabilitations were interrupted

Source: Varma, 2021–2024

What do we know?

The success of rehabilitation depends on the individual's background factors and health, the rehabilitation measures taken and the support provided by the workplace. Returning to work after rehabilitation is often more challenging for older people and those whose reason for work disability is related to mental disorders. Delays in the start of rehabilitation and breaks during rehabilitation may impair the success of rehabilitation. However, planned and supported breaks can also contribute to the success of rehabilitation in some cases.

Why is this important?

Successful rehabilitation often means that the person is able to continue to work in work tasks suitable for their work ability either at their own workplace or in a new job. Reducing delays and breaks is important because they increase the risk of work disability and exclusion from the labour market.

Delays and breaks

In our study, delay refers to the time that elapses between receiving the decision on the right to rehabilitation and the start of the rehabilitation measures. A break refers to a break lasting 30 or more consecutive days during rehabilitation, during which the rehabilitant is not paid rehabilitation allowance.

Reasons for delays in starting rehabilitation and breaks according to our research interviews

Rehabilitée

- low motivation for rehabilitation
- poor health or unfinished treatment of the disease
- difficult life situation

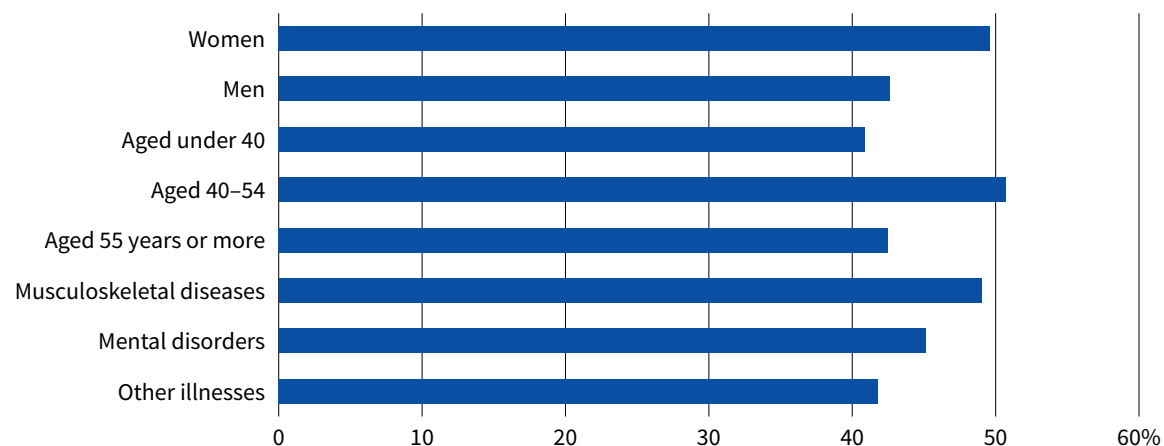
Workplace

- conditions at the workplace (e.g. excessively demanding work tasks, poor working atmosphere, problems in personal relations, organisational changes)
- inadequate social support
- seasonal fluctuations (e.g. holiday periods)

Others

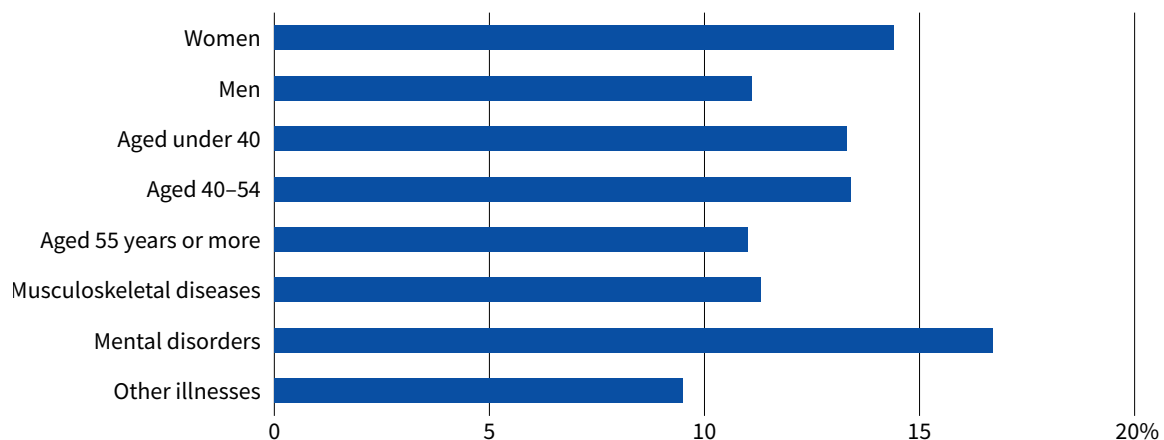
- limited number of work trial places
- structural factors of the rehabilitation system (e.g. aiming for full-time work)
- start dates of new training
- lack of information about contacting the pension insurance company to initiate rehabilitation

A long delay is more common among women, middle-aged people and rehabilitees with musculoskeletal diseases



Source: Varma's data, 2021–2024.

Breaks are more common among women, people under the age of 55 and rehabilitees with mental disorders



Source: Varma's data, 2021–2024.

A long delay of more than four months after a positive rehabilitation decision reduces the success of rehabilitation by approximately one-third compared to rehabilitation started earlier. Breaks during rehabilitation also affect the success of rehabilitation: the chance of success is almost halved compared to a situation where rehabilitation progresses without breaks.

What should be done?

To prevent delays and breaks, a rehabilitation-friendly culture should be created at the workplace, in which participation in rehabilitation is actively supported and sufficient resources are reserved for it. The smoothness of the rehabilitation process can be promoted with clear operating models, flexible work arrangements and proactive planning. It is important to offer the rehabilitee individual guidance and support immediately after the rehabilitation decision. Rehabilitation and related work arrangements must also be planned in cooperation, and the progress of rehabilitation must be monitored regularly. In addition, the changes in work arrangements should be communicated transparently and sensitively to the work community so that the rehabilitee can return to work as smoothly as possible.

Factors influencing the success of rehabilitation

- Ensuring timely rehabilitation
- Supporting the rehabilitees motivation and active role
- Realistic rehabilitation plan (individual arrangements and flexibility)
- Individual support for the rehabilitee, with the supervisor playing a key role
- The work community's positive attitude towards partial work ability
- Multidisciplinary cooperation (workplace, occupational health care, acting pension insurance company and other parties involved in rehabilitation)

How the workplace can promote smooth vocational rehabilitation

Effective workplace practices

- Early support and effective cooperation with occupational health care. Challenges related to work ability are discussed in good time and occupational health negotiations are initiated early enough.
- Concrete everyday support measures, such as flexible work tasks and working hours, support for supervisors and colleagues, and jointly agreed procedures for monitoring the progress of rehabilitation.
- Competence development: opportunities are offered for training, orientation or learning new types of tasks.
- Enabling relocation, for example, finding work tasks at the workplace that are better suited to the employee's health.

Cooperation in the rehabilitation service system

- Close and goal-oriented cooperation with the workplace, occupational health care, pension insurance company and any rehabilitation partner.
- Clear roles, responsibilities and next steps contribute to success.
- The flexibility of the workplace in training and transition situations, such as enabling rehabilitation-related training, work trials or gradual return to work without unnecessary interruptions.

Positive attitudes and sharing information about rehabilitation

- Setting an example as an employer of people with partial work ability strengthens the positive atmosphere at the workplace and lowers the threshold for offering rehabilitation opportunities in the future.
- A responsible workplace shares good practices and experiences of successful work trials and returning to work, also with other workplaces.



There are many ways to influence the timeliness and smoothness of rehabilitation at the workplace!

Vocational rehabilitation and the role of the workplace

The aim of vocational rehabilitation is to strengthen and support the person's work ability, prevent premature disability and keep the costs of disability under control. Means of rehabilitation include work trials, job coaching, retraining and business subsidy for starting or continuing one's own undertaking. The workplace can offer work trial places, strengthen supervisors' competence in vocational rehabilitation and support the rehabilitee

How the fact sheet was prepared

The fact sheet is based on Varma's data and studies that examine the role of the workplace in preventing disability, managing disability risks and promoting successful rehabilitation.

Read our other reports on our website (in Finnish) at www.varma.fi/tutkimus

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