

Working with a disability

dis·abil·i·ty noun \,dis-ə- 'bi-lə-tē\

a condition (such as an illness or an injury) that damages or limits a person's physical or mental abilities; the condition of being disabled.



The International Labour Organization, an agency of the United Nations, issued a report in 2007, [Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenges of a Disability](#), that challenged the concept that people with disabilities are less productive than their non-disabled counterparts. In fact, the report suggests that they may even be more productive in some jobs than non-disabled people. If you have a mental or physical disability and want to go back to work, take heart – it is possible to excel on the job even with a disability.

Work performance and productivity

A growing body of evidence shows that [workers with disabilities meet or exceed the job performance](#) of co-workers without disabilities. However, working with a disability has its own unique set of challenges. For example, your disability may require reasonable accommodations from your employer, or your co-workers may prejudice your abilities based on misconceptions and stereotypes.

Accommodating a disability

Your employer may need to make changes based on your disability. In Canada, employers are legally obligated to make reasonable accommodation through the [Employment Equity Act](#). Under paragraph 5(b) of that Act, employers must make "such reasonable accommodations as will ensure that persons in designated groups achieve a degree of representation in each occupational group in the employer's workforce that reflects their representation in society." An example of a reasonable accommodation is modifying a work schedule or making available adaptive technology such as a screen reader for the visually impaired.

Overcoming stigma at work

While you can't control what others think, you can fight stigma and lay the groundwork for a successful working relationship with others. Unfortunately, many conditions, including mental disorders, epilepsy, deafness, visual impairment and others remain stigmatized. Some of your co-workers will be compassionate due to their own experiences with mental or physical disabilities, while others will be influenced by myths and misconceptions. It's helpful to be open about your condition. Educating others both with facts and by your actions can make a big difference in how you are perceived.

Your disability doesn't define who you are or what you're capable of, nor should the misperceptions of others. Assuming you're otherwise qualified and ready to return to work with reasonable accommodations, the future has great potential.