

Employment and mental health

Use this grid to help you and your healthcare provider talk about the benefits and risks of staying off work or looking for paid work.

Frequently asked questions	Continue to stay off paid work	Taking steps to go back to paid work, with the help of an employment specialist (see note 1 below)
Does being at work make a difference to my health?	Research shows that being off all types of work for more than six months leads to poor health, both physical and mental. The longer you are not working, the higher the risks to your health.	Going back to any type of work is good for your physical and mental health and helps prevent you from becoming unwell again. It can undo the harm caused by being out of work for a long time. Research has shown that paid work improves income, use of time, motivation, confidence and self-esteem, and leads to better emotional well-being. Jobs that match your skills, and where employers support you, are good for your mental health.
What are the benefits?	For most people, there are no benefits to being off all types of work for more than six months.	You are three times more likely to get paid work if you get help from an employment specialist. They can advise you on many challenges, such as talking about your mental health condition with potential employers and work colleagues. They can also help you deal with the worry of starting work, as well as concerns about the nature of your mental health condition, previous drug use, or a criminal record affecting your ability to get a job.
What are the risks?	It is difficult to predict how symptoms change, so waiting until you feel well increases the risk of never getting back to work. The more time you spend out of paid work, the harder it is to start. You risk losing your confidence and feeling isolated, or becoming anxious about losing your skills and knowledge. You might also feel awkward if asked to explain a work gap to an employer.	You may feel stressed or anxious that returning to paid work will reduce any government benefits you get because you are unemployed, or that you will have to talk about your mental health condition with an employer. An employment specialist and your health provider will help you tackle these concerns.
What are my choices?	<p>If you don't feel ready for paid work, you can consider other work activities, for example, studying, volunteering, or caring for somebody. Talk to your health provider about your work goals and ask them to make a note of them in your treatment plan.</p> <p>You might decide not to work, but there is plenty of evidence that this does not benefit either your physical or mental health. Before deciding not to work at all, you might want to get advice from an employment specialist.</p>	If you want to go back to paid work, you can be referred to an employment specialist. They will help you match your preferences, experiences and strengths to jobs. Many people start by working part-time and find that part-time suits them. Others move to full-time, with or without support from the employment specialist.
How soon can I return to work?	Does not apply.	You can make plans to return to paid work as soon as you want to do so. You don't have to wait for your symptoms to get better. An employment specialist will usually help you start your job search within four weeks of you first contacting them.

Note 1: The term 'employment specialist' describes an employment consultant or advisor who works in an evidence-based way to support people who experience mental health conditions to find and stay in paid work.

You can find more information on evidence-based supported employment at: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ips/> and <http://www.tepou.co.nz/improving-services/ebse>

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Evidence document: http://www.optiongrid.org/resources/employmentandmentalhealth_evidence.pdf

More information: <http://www.optiongrid.org/about.php>

Last update: 05-April-2013 **Next update:** 05-April-2014 **ISBN:** 978-0-9575461-5-8

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