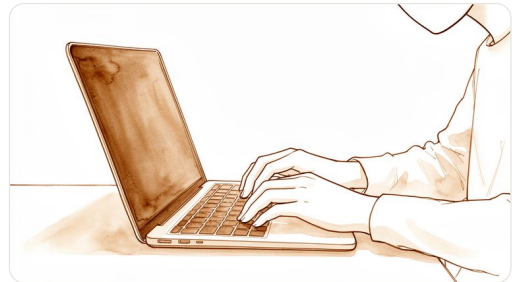


# Returning to work

Returning to work depends on what your job demands of the operated limb. Desk-based work is usually possible long before manual or heavy lifting work.

Kieran Hirpara 4.0



When you can return to work depends much more on what your job demands than on the operation itself. A bricklayer and an accountant will recover the same shoulder repair, but the bricklayer waits months longer to return to their full duties.

## Three categories of work

It helps to think about your job in three buckets:

- **Sedentary** – desk work, phone, computer, light writing. Most patients return to this within 1–2 weeks for hand and wrist surgery, 2–4 weeks for shoulder surgery – sometimes earlier with adjustments such as one-handed typing or voice dictation.
- **Light manual** – driving short distances, handling under 5 kg, light cleaning, retail, cooking. Typically 2–6 weeks depending on the operation.
- **Heavy manual** – lifting over 10 kg, repetitive overhead work, scaffolding, trades, nursing with patient handling. Often 3–6 months, sometimes longer.

## Medical certificates

We typically issue an initial certificate covering the first 2–4 weeks of recovery, then update it at each review appointment.

A return-to-work certificate from your treating doctor lists what you can and cannot do. Many workplaces accept “graded return” – half days, lighter duties, or rotated tasks – for a few weeks before you go back to full duties. Talk to your manager and HR before your operation if you can.

## WorkCover

If your injury is work-related, your treatment may be covered by WorkCover or a similar scheme. The treating doctor will fill in workers’ compensation paperwork at each visit.

## What slows return down

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- Pain that isn't being managed well
- Persistent swelling and stiffness
- Wound problems that delay rehab starting
- Trying to do too much, too early – leading to a setback

## What helps

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- Doing your hand-therapy exercises consistently
- A workplace willing to offer modified duties
- Being honest with your therapist about what your job actually involves