

# HEALTH AND WORK

Health is important both to enable us to stay in work and to enable us to enjoy the quality of life in retirement. But it is perhaps more important than we think.

Poor health and disability is the most common factor in pushing people out of work, especially for those in their 50s and early 60s. One study found that of those who had retired early, 49% gave ill health as one of the reasons. For those leaving work before age 55, health is by far the most significant factor. In the 50 to 55 age group a man is 10 times more likely to leave work through ill health than redundancy. Some people leave work on health grounds initially on a temporary basis with the intention of returning later. Statistics show that the likelihood of someone who leaves work through ill health or disability returning are slim and that the chances decrease the longer they remain out of work. Those who leave work through ill health usually do so involuntarily.

Clearly health matters. If you are unfortunate enough to suffer ill health, you are likely to lose control of how long you are able to work. No one seeks ill health and disability but attention to preventative approaches to health issues should be one of your priorities if you wish to remain in work and enjoy quality of life as you move into retirement.

There are new ways to look after your health and wellbeing; these use your natural mind – body – spirit links. Simple actions like:

- being positive – to look on the bright side – to really smile – to think that the glass is half full
- to believe that “I can do it” and that “I am able”

Working needs you to maintain your **Physical Health / Capacity**

You can improve and maintain your physical fitness by:

- walking or cycling part of the way to work
- doing some quick stretching during the day
- using the stairs instead of the lift
- taking a 5 minute walking break
- when on the phone, stand or march on the spot
- Bend, stretch, move, lift, carry whenever the opportunity arises

## Mental health and resilience

Our mental resources and coping mechanisms play a key role in our health, both in experiencing problems and overcoming them. Below are some tips to enhance and maintain your mental wellbeing.

- Keep a positive attitude to work
- Check your motivation
- Accept yourself as you are
- Keep up an interest in learning new things
- Make sure that learning is enjoyable
- Use your wisdom, experience and tacit knowledge (know how)
- Change your routine from time to time (if possible)
- Get sufficient sleep
- Talk and socialise with others
- Accept diversity and differences of people
- Be proud of your skills and be prepared to show them to others
- Seek to improve competences and embrace change as a challenge
- Use all your resources: physical, mental, social and spiritual
- Know your learning style.

In the modern workplace, resilience – the ability to be successful, personally and professionally, in a highly pressured and fast-paced environment – is a key attribute.

Recent research has shown that self esteem is very important and when positive is particularly helpful in coping with change in the workplace and retaining employment. Self esteem and self-identity together with fulfilment and quality of life are important factors in successful ageing as is nurturing the human spirit.

The areas that enhance our feelings of wellbeing and self esteem are:

- what we know
- what we want (and expect)
- what we do
- what we have achieved (in work and in life)
- who we compare ourselves to
- how we look.

Having high self esteem stands you in good stead in the workplace as it helps to build resilience and often leads to promotion, career development and being retained.

The TUC recommend the following to prevent health deterioration:

- taking proper breaks (as provided)
- adjusting chair(s) properly / shifting working position
- checking that health and safety regulations are activated
- acting on early symptoms and signs of health problems.

#### **Common health problems for older workers**

As you age the most common health problems at work are skeleton (back) problems for those in physical or manual jobs and stress for white collar workers. As you focus on preventative approaches you might want to think about how to avoid these problems. It may be useful to discuss with your employer the possibility of flexible working, or phased retirement, as this can prolong your working life and take advantage of the health benefits that work provides. Job design is important: can the job be fitted to you rather than you to the job?