

# Maximising the Role of Exercise Physiologists in Work Injury Management

## An Introduction for Case Managers

**Accredited Exercise Physiologists** are allied health professionals who specialise in clinical exercise interventions for people with injuries and chronic conditions. They apply evidence-based movement and behavioural strategies to improve function, reduce pain, and support recovery and return to work (RTW).

Exercise plays a key role in work injury recovery. Focusing on restoring movement and function, **EPs help workers gain confidence in their physical abilities.** EPs are trained to address physical impairments and psychosocial factors that influence recovery and long-term health outcomes.

### Overcoming Barriers with Exercise and Motivation - Case Study

John, a warehouse worker, sustained a significant shoulder injury at work. Initially hesitant due to pain and anxiety about re-injury, John worked closely with an EP who developed a tailored exercise plan and gradually simulated workplace tasks. Regular communication and goal-setting kept John motivated. The EP identified barriers such as fear of movement and lack of confidence, providing targeted strategies and continuous support. Within eight weeks, John returned successfully to modified duties, reporting improved physical ability and reduced anxiety.



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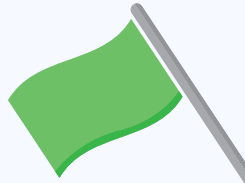
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## How can EPs support recovery and RTW?

- EPs design tailored exercise programs to enhance strength, mobility, and endurance, improving work capacity and reducing re-injury risk.
- Exercise promotes mental well-being by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression, key factors in work disability.
- EPs simulate workplace tasks to facilitate a graded and safe RTW transition.
- EPs empower workers with knowledge about injury prevention, movement patterns, and strategies to enhance workplace function.
- Proactive engagement with an EP reduces prolonged work absence by identifying and addressing functional impairments and recovery barriers early.
- Workers off work for extended periods often become deconditioned and gain weight. EPs implement targeted strategies to counteract this, improving physical resilience and metabolic health.
- EPs provide valuable insights into physical capacity, work readiness, and tailored accommodations for workers.
- EPs conduct functional capacity evaluations (FCEs) to inform RTW planning and treatment pathways.
- EP interventions address immediate injuries and equip workers with strategies for maintaining long-term health and work capacity.

## How to Recognise an EP is Doing a Good Job



By understanding the role of EPs and monitoring their effectiveness, case managers ensure rehabilitation services are outcome-driven and aligned with the best interests of workers and employers.

### An Effective EP:

- sets clear treatment milestones, regularly reviews progress, and adjusts the program as needed.
- prioritises suitable duties and actively collaborates with employers, case managers, GPs, physiotherapists, and rehab providers for a coordinated care approach.
- provides timely, detailed reports with objective data on progress, identified barriers, and developed strategies to address them.

### With Effective EP care, you should notice:

- The worker shows documented functional improvements within a reasonable timeframe.
- The worker is motivated, understands their program, and actively participates in their recovery.
- Sessions decrease as the worker gains independence and self-management skills.
- If extended care is recommended, the EP clearly explains why and how it benefits RTW outcomes.



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