

A physical injury can become a mental injury too

Employer resource



Watch the video

When someone is physically injured at work, it's important that they get the care and treatment they need to recover and get back to life and work.

Did you know that mental injuries can also happen after or in connection to a physical injury at work?

This can happen over time and is sometimes called a secondary mental injury.

Secondary mental injuries can happen due to:

- A worker struggling to cope or adapt to life with a physical injury, such as chronic pain
- Their physical injury may have been caused by a traumatic event, like an assault
- Worries about what the future holds, and how their physical injury will impact their life
- Feeling anxious or uncertain about going back to work, or what people might think when they return
- Their recovery is taking longer than expected or they can't do what they used to do
- Workplace issues or barriers that affect pain or functioning.



Signs to look out for with a physical injury:

While mental ill health affects everyone differently, there are some changes and signs to look out for during recovery from an injury or illness, such as:

- Becoming unusually emotional, easily frustrated or withdrawn
- Seeming sad, down or 'flat'
- Being very pain-focused or reluctant to come back to work, even once their doctor says it's safe to do so
- Mentioning sleeplessness, flashbacks or nightmares
- Trouble concentrating, making decisions, or managing tasks
- Avoiding workplace activities
- Changes to their appearance, such as looking tired and seeming stressed
- Anxiety around returning to work or reinjury

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Your role as an employer

You can have a big impact on a worker's recovery by reaching out early and showing your care and support.

Supporting your worker through a claim has been shown to be beneficial to their mental health and increase their likelihood of returning to work sooner.

Staying connected also helps you stay informed on how you can assist your worker in their recovery and return to work, when the time's right.

Ways you can help

- Get in touch with your worker early, show genuine support and understanding and plan to stay connected.
Watch: Tips for talking to workers and their team after an injury
- Offer work your worker can do safely while they recover, also known as suitable duties.
Watch: How do I find suitable duties for my worker after they've been injured?
- Help reduce stigma for your worker around making a claim for a physical injury.
Watch: Workplace mental injury: myths and facts
- Foster a workplace culture where everyone feels valued, and workers can speak freely about safety and wellbeing.



Mental health support for your worker

If your worker does develop a mental injury in connection to their physical injury, it's important to remember many people can and do recover fully.

Getting the right support early can really help. If you notice your worker's not coping, they can access support:

Workers' Psychological Support Service

This is a free, confidential and independent callback service where workers can access support from a social worker. Find out more: Call 1800 370 732 (during business hours) or visit wpss.org.au

For workers with a physical injury or illness

Workers with an accepted physical injury claim can access sessions with a counsellor or psychologist to support their mental health.
Find out more: **Adjustment to Injury Counselling.**

For workers with a mental injury

Workers can receive treatment before their mental injury claim is accepted so recovery can start sooner.
Find out more: **Early mental health support.**

Find more mental health services **on our website.**

Need urgent help? If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, call Lifeline on **13 11 14**. If life is in immediate danger call **000**.

WorkCover is here to help

If you have any questions, you can find your claim contact on WorkCover Connect and reach them directly. Or you can call one of our team on **1300 927 928**.

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