

PLANNING YOUR CONVERSATION ABOUT ARTHRITIS AT WORK



Planning Your Conversation about Arthritis at Work is a tool to help employees start a dialogue about their workplace needs as they relate to arthritis. The information provided is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace professional advice. A disability manager or human resources professional can often help determine the most appropriate accommodations to meet your needs. Health care professionals may also be able to provide important advice about health limitations at work. If you require legal advice, please contact an appropriate legal professional.

Once you've decided to share some information about your workplace limitations or arthritis with your employer, this resource will help you discuss your needs. If you're still trying to decide whether or not to give your employer some information about your condition's possible impact on your job, visit the [Disclosing Your Condition resources](#) on our [workplace portal for employees](#). In order to access accommodations at work, you aren't required to share your specific diagnosis (i.e. arthritis) or its symptoms (e.g., pain, fatigue), but you will need to discuss limitations related to your job. This can include difficulties with meeting job demands or being unable to perform some job tasks. Some employers may require a note from your doctor confirming these limitations and their potential impact on your work.

When talking to your employer about your arthritis for the first time, it can be helpful to write down in advance what you plan to say and practice with a family member or friend. To help you prepare your script, here are some key questions to think about beforehand:

1. Who will be your audience? Is it your boss? Your co-workers? The human resources department? A union representative? You may want to think about who the most appropriate person(s) would be to speak to first. Keep in mind that some people you speak to may need to share the information with others in order to provide support. If you want information to be confidential, be sure to let people know so that this can be discussed.

2. What do you want to achieve? Are you just keeping them informed about the possibility that your arthritis could affect your job in the future? Does the impact of arthritis on your job create a health or safety concern for you or others? Do you have specific requests, such as a particular type of accommodation? If there are health and safety concerns, you should talk to someone in authority in your workplace to protect the safety of everyone. If you're requesting an accommodation, it can be helpful to research your options beforehand, starting with our [Interactive Online Accommodation Tool](#).

3. What are two or three key messages you want to get across? You might want to consider your key messages beforehand in relation to your audience's interests and concerns. These concerns could include attendance at work or changes in your productivity and ability to get work done, for example.

4. What are the strengths that you bring to the organization? How will your employer's support help you maintain those strengths?

5. What do you want them to know about your condition? Do you just want to share your workplace limitations, or do you want to share your diagnosis and symptoms? People vary in their preferences for sharing private information. Don't feel pressured to provide private health information about your arthritis if you don't want to. It isn't necessary to provide a diagnosis or symptoms to get workplace support.

6. How can the situation be a "win" for both of you? How will their support help maintain and maximize your productivity in a way that's beneficial to both of you? Think about any concerns someone may have and to try and think of ways to remove or prevent a potential problem. Although it's not your responsibility to solve everything on your own, being prepared can help.

7. What are your expectations? If you're requesting changes or accommodations, when can these reasonably be expected to take place? When will you have a follow-up check-in with your employer? Many supports and accommodations can be introduced at low cost or with little disruption to work. However, it's important to know if you or your employer have unrealistic expectations about what you can do or what accommodations may be available.

PLANNING YOUR SCRIPT

When planning your conversation, it can be helpful to focus on the positive and what you bring to the organization as a hard-working, qualified employee. Consider emphasizing what you can do rather than what you can't, and how additional support can help you maximize your skills and abilities. You might want to be prepared to address any questions or concerns from your employer and remain solution-oriented, providing concrete suggestions of ways to help you do your best work. Keeping open lines of communication and reassuring your employer that you are responsive to feedback can be a useful approach to take.

- ✓ **You may want to start by explaining that you have a chronic medical condition and would like to discuss strategies that can help you thrive at work. You don't need to tell anyone your arthritis symptoms or the type of arthritis, but you can if you are comfortable. For example:**

I have a chronic medical condition and would like to discuss strategies to help me continue to thrive at work.

- ✓ **Think about listing your strengths and abilities, as well as functional limitations:**

I'm a hard-working, qualified employee and I bring a number of strengths to this organization, including [list strengths]. I'm able to perform the essential functions of my job, but sometimes my condition might make it difficult for me to [list tasks you have difficulty with].

- ✓ **Consider telling people that you're able to self-manage your condition much of the time and what might be helpful in the workplace:**

I'm able to manage many of my symptoms day-to-day on my own. Often my condition doesn't affect my ability to do my job. It would be helpful if I have [describe accommodations you need] to maximize my strengths and minimize my limitations.

- ✓ **It can be helpful to explain what your goals are for this conversation:**

I would like to discuss accommodations we could put in place to ensure I'm able to do my best work.

- ✓ **It may be useful to reassure them of your ability to perform your role:**

I am confident that my skills, experience and dedication will enable me to succeed in my role and continue to bring value to the organization.

To summarize, your disclosure script may include the following points and any others you might want to address:

- ▼ I have a chronic medical condition....
- ▼ My strengths and abilities in relation to this job are....
- ▼ The difficulties I experience with some job tasks are....
- ▼ The accommodations I need are....

SAMPLE RESPONSES

1. Who will be your audience?

- ▼ My manager

2. What do you want to achieve?

- ▼ I want my manager to know that my health condition could affect my attendance at work, especially when I have health care appointments
- ▼ I would like to request to work from home when my condition flares up
- ▼ I would like to request speech recognition software so I don't have as much typing to do. A chair or stool would help me avoid standing for long periods of time

3. What are two or three key messages you want to get across?

- ▼ I have a chronic condition that can make certain tasks difficult
- ▼ I am a valuable member of the team and bring many skills and abilities to the organization
- ▼ There are some accommodations that could be put in place to keep me doing my job well and reduce absences

4. What are the strengths that you bring to the organization? How will your employers support help you maintain those strengths?

- ▼ I'm a hard worker, good at data analysis
- ▼ I'm a loyal employee who has been with the company for 6 years
- ▼ I'm a strategic thinker and have increased team efficiency

5. What do you want them to know about your condition?

- ▼ Just limitations
- ▼ I have difficulty typing and grasping
- ▼ I am easily fatigued, especially later in the afternoon
- ▼ Standing for a long period can be difficult for me

6. How can the situation be a "win" for both of you?

- ▼ Work from home days will keep me working productively because I won't be as exhausted from the commute
- ▼ Speech recognition software will help me complete tasks on time when my hands are too stiff to type
- ▼ I believe the supports I need will allow me to continue to work well and won't put any additional responsibilities on my co-workers

7. What are your expectations?

- ▼ I hope to have accommodations in place within the next month
- ▼ A follow-up check-in a month after that would be helpful

SAMPLE SCRIPT

Hi Tom. Do you have a moment to talk? There is something I'd like to discuss. I wanted to let you know that I have a chronic medical condition and would like to talk about ways to help me continue to thrive at work and do the best job possible. As you know, I'm a hard-working, qualified employee and I bring a number of strengths to this organization, including my data analysis and strategic thinking skills. I'm able to perform the essential functions of my job, but sometimes my condition might interfere with my ability to type or grasp objects or stand for long periods of time. Some days it can be difficult to get to work on time when my condition flares up. I'm often able to manage day-to-day by taking good care of myself. However, sometimes my condition can make certain tasks difficult.

It would be helpful if I had speech recognition software to reduce the need for typing and a chair or stool to reduce the time I spend standing. Speech recognition software will help me complete tasks on time. It would also be helpful if I could work from home on days when my symptoms are really bad. Working from home when needed will keep me productive on days when it is too difficult to make the commute to the office. These supports will help me maximize my strengths and minimize any disruption to my work, without putting any additional responsibilities on my co-workers. I hope that these accommodations can be put in place within the next month, and that we can have a follow-up check-in a month after that. I am confident that my skills, experience and dedication will enable me to succeed in my role and continue to bring value to the organization. I am happy to answer any questions or address any concerns you might have.

The *Planning Your Conversation about Arthritis and Work* tool was developed in collaboration with the ACED Partnership Project, with expert advice from:

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SOURCES

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