

How to Get Chronic Illness Needs Met at Work

Working with a chronic illness is very challenging, especially when you are concerned that no one understands your unique needs. By communicating to your employer those needs, work can go much smoother, and you at least won't have *that* unnecessary stress looming over you.

Everyone facing chronic illness has different needs in the workplace. When dealing with peripheral neuropathy, for example, one person may experience burning pain in their legs after standing a length of time. While another may experience weakness in their hands and are at risk for dropping things.

Some may prefer that no one at their office know their health status, or at least its full extent. But others are better off explaining to those around them how a condition may impact their work.

When slight adjustments in your job expectations could benefit both you and your employer, your best bet is probably talking honestly and openly about your needs.

If you decide you'd like to begin a conversation with your employer about your chronic illness, here are some strategies to help.

Start With The Goal In Mind

What is it that you want to communicate? It's easiest to communicate important information effectively by reviewing it thoroughly beforehand while keeping a clear end goal in mind.

If you're just interested in making your employer aware of your situation, think through how much or how little they need to know. This can help you avoid saying too much or too

little, or confusing the matter with unnecessary details.

Come up with some clear options and tangible actions your employer can take to help you succeed in the workplace.

Keep in mind that talking to your boss should not be about complaining, it's about informing in order to reach a particular goal.

Read the Employee Handbook

Explore your employee handbook so you know what kinds of expectations are already in place and how your needs might fit into them.

If you need to rethink your schedule, is flex scheduling allowed? If you're hoping for breaks during the day, are there rules in place already you don't know about?

Your workplace might already have protections or procedures in place for health-related complications. If nothing else, do your best to see how your requests might fit into the employee guidelines or the culture of the company.

Know the Americans with Disabilities Act Guidelines

If your condition qualifies as a disability, your employer is required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to make certain accommodations. While they must be within reasonable limits, sometimes modifications as simple as adjusting your schedule, providing an adjustable chair, or more frequent breaks can be helpful.

Here's how ADA describes reasonable accommodations: "Reasonable accommodation is any modification or adjustment to a job or the work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions. It also

includes adjustments to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities.”

For more details, check out [these FAQs from the Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) regarding disability accommodations in the workplace.

Set Up a Meeting

Feel prepared? It’s time to talk to your boss or human resources. Hopefully, you have a general sense of who can help you with this kind of request. If not, the HR office is an excellent place to start.

Set up a formalized meeting to help avoid misunderstanding and to ensure the person has time to talk.

Highlight Employer Benefits

In addition to explaining your situation and requests, focusing on how these changes might benefit your employer will help your case. Keep in mind the basic psychological principle that [people want to understand personal context](#) (in other words, what’s in it for them) before they can accept change.

Let’s say you have trouble with stairs and would do best to have your office on the first floor. Maybe you can explain how catching your breath after the stair climb means you lose 15-20 minutes of work. You’d love to use those extra moments of energy to improve the company. (See how that works?)

Tips for Success

Take time to review some tips on communicating your chronic peripheral neuropathy illness successfully.

- Keep it short and sweet.

- Speak confidently and clearly.
- Remember that kindness will usually be met with kindness.
- If things don't go well, remain calm and don't give up. Seek outside help.

Learn more general [strategies](#) and [skills](#) for effective communication in the workplace.

Final Words

Sharing with someone your medical illness, especially an employer, can be scary. But accurately and effectively explaining your needs and accommodation ideas will help you both. By applying these communication strategies, you will be better prepared for that conversation with your boss. Feeling prepared leads to greater self-confidence. This results in a more effective conversation leading to a more successful outcome for everyone involved.

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