

GUIDE TO THE NEW 'FIT NOTE'

Introduced in April 2010 the new 'fit note' replaces the GP sick note. The official name for this document is the Statement of Fitness for Work and it is intended to help more people stay in work.

What stays the same?

The fit note can still provide evidence that an employee cannot work due to illness or injury.

The employee should still self-certify their sickness for the first seven days of absence.

The requirements for payment of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) remain the same. If the doctor recommends that an employee '*may be fit for work*' but the employer and employee agree that the employee should remain off work, the SSP should still be paid

What is different?

The main change with the fit note is that the doctor can advise that an employee may be fit to work if they get appropriate support from their employer.

When doctors complete a fit note, they will advise on one of two options: either an employee will be '*not fit for work*' or '*may be fit for work*'.

- ***Not fit for work***

The doctor will choose this option when they believe that the health condition prevents an employee from working for a stated period of time.

- ***May be fit for work***

The doctor will choose this option when they believe that an employee may be able to return to work with some help from the employer.

The doctor may include some comments which will help explain how an employee is affected by the condition. They can also suggest some ways to help with a return to work. This could include:

- Phased return to work - where there is a gradual increase in work duties or working hours, for example after an operation or after injury.
- Altered hours – allowing some flexibility to start late or leave early. An example of this is to save staff having to deal with rush hour travelling in the early stages of recovery.
- Amended duties – this enables certain duties that might prevent recovery to be removed on a short term basis, for example, heavy lifting tasks.

- Workplace adaptations - these can be as simple as relocating an employee to the ground floor if they are struggling with stairs.

The advantage of the fit note is that staff can come back to work and perform modified duties and, or, modified hours which in most cases will **significantly reduce the time it takes them to get back to full fitness and full duties.**

People recovering from musculo-skeletal disorders make quicker and more sustained recovery when they use work as part of their rehabilitation.

This is how the fit note looks:

**Statement of Fitness for Work
For social security or Statutory Sick Pay**

Patient's name ¹ Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms

I assessed your case on: ² / /

and, because of the following condition(s): ³

I advise you that: ⁴ you are not fit for work.
⁵ you may be fit for work taking account of the following advice:

If available, and with your employer's agreement, you may benefit from:

a phased return to work ⁶ amended duties
 altered hours workplace adaptations

Comments, including functional effects of your condition(s): ⁷

SAMPLE

This will be the case for ⁸ / /
or from ⁹ / / to / /

¹⁰ I will/will not need to assess your fitness for work again at the end of this period.
(Please delete as applicable)

Doctor's signature

Date of statement / /

Doctor's address ¹¹

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How to get the most from the fit note

The most important thing is for employees to discuss the fit note with their employees. The fit note is an opportunity to challenge some of the outdated employment practices that we now know contribute to long term absence:

- Employees do not have to be completely pain free before they return to work – adjustments to the workplace, work duties or work hours can enable staff to work as they recover.
- Employees recovering from musculo-skeletal disorders are encouraged by the healthcare professionals treating them to be as active as possible – this should include being active in the workplace.
- It is very difficult to be fully fit for work without exposure to work – always try to get staff back as early as possible.
- Absence from the work environment leads to long term (sometimes permanent) incapacity.

Further information

For more information visit the following websites:

Direct Gov:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/Sicknessabsence/DG_187161

NHS Choices:

<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1062.aspx?CategoryID=68&SubCategoryID=158>

Department of Work and Pensions

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/fitnote-gp-guide.pdf>