MS Society

Work and MS

an employee's guide

We're the MS Society. Our community is here for you through the highs, lows and everything in between. We understand what life's like with MS.

Together, we are strong enough to stop MS.

We rely on the generosity of people like you to fund our vital work. If you would like to make a donation, you can do so by:

- Calling us on: **0300 500 8084**.
  Lines are open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm
- Visiting us at: **mssociety.org.uk/donate**
- Posting your donation to: MS Society, National Centre, 372 Edgware Road, London NW2 6ND. Please make cheques payable to the 'MS Society.'

Contents

A word from Tijana, who has MS	4
Five things to know	5
About this booklet	7
Telling people: who and when?	8
Support to help you at work	16
Time off work	25
Looking for work	30
Self-employment	35
Cutting your hours, retraining or retiring	38
Your rights	43
What to do if you're not being treated fairly	47
Useful organisations	52
New words explained	57
Further information	58

A word from Tijana, who has MS

I was diagnosed with MS in 2016 after experiencing a life-changing relapse. The right side of my body was completely numb for weeks and I lost the function of my right hand. This was a frightening and challenging period for me and my family.

I knew my personal and work life were never going to be the same again. My colleagues at the children's charity I worked at were absolutely wonderful. It took me two months to recover and return to work full time.

During my recovery they offered unconditional support, friendship, various options for work, including working from home and a phased return to work. My house was filled with flowers and chocolates.

Once I was ready to go back to the office full time, they offered flexibility for my doctor's appointments and regular weekly treatments. They were also incredibly understanding when I decided to leave and pursue my career goals.

I met recruiters and prospective employers and learned life with a disability isn't easy. I wasn't sure whether to be honest about my MS, especially during interviews.

But I decided to speak boldly about my disability whenever it was relevant.

I believe that openness brought me to my current job. My manager is aware of the challenges I'm facing on a daily basis and supports me unreservedly.

As you face the world of work and MS, I hope you find this booklet - with its information, tips and real life stories - a help to you.

Tijana

Five things to know

1. Most people don't have to tell their employer about their MS

2. You're protected against discrimination at work by equality law. This means you can't be treated unfairly because you have MS

3. There is support to help you at work. You can ask for 'reasonable adjustments' to be made for you. You may get help through an Access to Work grant.

4. Straight after you've been diagnosed or had a relapse may not be the right time to make decisions about work.

5. With things like telling your employer or giving up work, give yourself time to adapt to your situation, and to think what would be best in the long term.

About this booklet

Most people are diagnosed with MS at an age when they're likely to be in work.

It's common to have questions like:

- Do I have to tell my employer?
- Will I be able to carry on doing my job?
- What are my rights?
- Can I get support at work?
- What if my employer discriminates against me?

This booklet answers questions like these, and points you towards more information and support.

You may not need extra support, especially early on. And if you do, you might only need small changes, known as 'reasonable adjustments'.

Maybe you don't feel you need any support now. But it's good to know what you're entitled to, in case things change later.

Staying in work is good for your finances. But work can also help you feel useful and valued, give structure to your life, and keep you physically active.

This booklet will hopefully help you keep working if you want that, and if it's possible.

Guidance for employers

We have a booklet called 'MS in the workplace: an employer's guide'. It includes what your employer can do to support you, as well as what the law says they must do. Find it and more information for your employer at **mssociety.org.uk/employers**

Our online information

A lot of what's in this booklet is also on our website at **mssociety.org.uk/work-and-you**

Our website has a toolkit with sample forms that you and your employer can use, along with case studies.

You'll find this toolkit at **mssociety.org.uk/work-toolkit**

Telling people: who and when?

For many people with MS, especially those who've just been diagnosed, a big worry is whether to tell their employer or the people they work with.

Telling an employer about your condition is known as 'disclosure'. Most people with MS don't have to disclose their diagnosis. But the law says some people have to do this.

Who has to tell their employer?

You must tell your employer about your MS if:

- you work in the armed forces
- your MS may affect health and safety in the workplace
- you drive for your job and any of the following are true:
  - you've had any restrictions placed on your licence because of your MS
  - you drive vehicles that you need a special licence for – such as a Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) or taxi
  - you're covered by your employer's insurance while driving
  - your MS affects your ability to drive safely

Should I tell my employer?

Except for the people we've just mentioned, there's no law that says you have to tell your employer you have MS. That said, it can be difficult to decide if it's best to tell them or say nothing.

If your MS isn't affecting how you work, you may not need to tell your employer. But you might want to think of telling them if:

- people will notice your symptoms
- your MS is starting to affect your work
- you need to take time off
- or you need 'reasonable adjustments' in your workplace

'Reasonable adjustments' are changes the law says an employer must make at work. They make

sure someone with a disability isn't at a disadvantage compared to a non-disabled person. They might also give you extra time off called disability leave.

But if you don't tell your employer you have MS, you won't be able to ask for these things. Read more about these adjustments on page 16 and disability leave on page 26.

Also, your employer might offer insurance or health benefits. But if you haven't told them about your MS, you may lose out on these.

Even if your MS doesn't affect your work at the moment, you may still want to tell your employer. That way they can help look after your health and well-being at work. And if your MS changes and you need time off or adjustments, they'll be aware of your situation.

If your MS starts to affect you at work, even if only for a short period, it can avoid mis-understandings if your employer knows. This can especially be true with hidden symptoms like fatigue or problems with your thinking or memory.

It's understandable that you may be worried about how your employer will react.

But research shows people who tell their employer they have MS are more likely to stay in work - and for longer - than those who don't say anything.

It might help to talk it through with someone you trust before you decide.

This could be your MS nurse (if you have one), a friend, member of your family, health worker or a union representative if you're in a union.

And don't forget: there are laws to prevent discrimination against disabled people at work, and having MS is covered by these. See page 43 for details.

Our 'Telling your employer' decision sheet in our online toolkit can help you decide whether to tell your employer.

"I've met some people who have had MS for years and never told their employer. I believe the only way they can understand your symptoms is if you tell them, otherwise they don't know what's going on."
Trishna

When should I tell my employer?

The best time to tell your employer is when you have a clear mind and your symptoms are relatively stable. An example would be once the effects of a relapse have levelled out.

This way, you're in a better position to answer questions your employer may have. These could be about how your MS may affect you at work, and what support you may need.

It might help – and be less stressful – if you tell your employer when you need only limited changes or adjustments.

Your employer's reaction to the news might be less positive if they're told after a relapse or major change in how you are.

How should I tell my employer?

There are various ways you could do this, depending on where you work.

You could have an informal chat, if you feel comfortable doing that. Or you could ask to have a formal meeting. You could also bring someone with you, such as a union representative or someone you work with.

Your employer might not know anything about MS. Even if they do, they won't know how it affects you. So you'll probably need to explain this to them.

We have a guide for employers, 'MS in the workplace: an employer's guide'. (see page 7). You could give it to your employer when you tell them you have MS.

You may find it helpful to give them our 'What is MS?' booklet, too. Or point them to our website or the MS Help Hub on **0808 800 8000**.

"The team knew I was going for lots of hospital appointments, but they didn't know why. A week after I'd been diagnosed, I called a team meeting and told them. It's funny, because the only time I cried telling anybody about my diagnosis was at work. I think I probably cried more because my team was so supportive. I was just overwhelmed"
Trishna

What should I tell my employer?

What you say is entirely up to you. It'll depend on how much you want them to know.

Some people have found that arming themselves with facts about MS is a good way of feeling prepared and confident to answer any questions.

You may want to bring up these points:

- there's evidence to show that work is good for the health of people with MS
- having MS doesn't change your skills and experience
- you could mention treatment or medical support you're getting to help manage your MS
- or bring up any difficulties you have at work and suggest solutions (like working from home or altering your breaks to help with tiredness)

Your employer is likely to ask how your MS might affect you at work. You might want to mention that your symptoms can change and come and go.

Before your meeting it's worth thinking about any support or adjustments you need. Find examples of these on page 16.

It'll probably help if you write down and practise what you're going to

say beforehand. Doing that will make you feel more comfortable talking about your MS and how it affects you.

When you've told your employer, it's a good idea to write down what you discussed, then send it to them afterwards. You'll then have a record of when you first told them about your MS, what you told them, and how they responded.

Do I have to tell the people I work with?

You may decide to tell your Human Resources (HR) department and your line manager.

This doesn't mean you have to share all or any of the information with other people you work with. You can decide that on a case by case basis.

You might agree some 'reasonable adjustments' with your employer. For example, you might be allowed to start later than everyone else.

But if people you work with don't know why, they might think you're getting unfair treatment.

If work does agree a 'reasonable adjustment' with you, for this to work you may need the cooperation of people you work with. This will mean telling them about your MS.

They may also get the wrong idea about some of your symptoms if they don't know.

For example, if you have problems with your balance, they may think you've been drinking. Or they might realise something's wrong, but feel they can't say anything to you about it.

It might be worth getting a letter from the medical team that look after your MS. That can explain any invisible symptoms others might find hard to understand like fatigue, dizziness, and so on.

Before you tell other people at work, perhaps talk to your manager about what to tell them – and how. One way would be to ask for time at a team meeting to explain your situation.

Your employer isn't allowed to tell people you work with about your MS unless you say that's OK. There's more on confidentiality on page 45.

Dealing with reactions

When you tell people you work with that you have MS, they can react in different ways – and not always how you expect.

People may support you. They might be curious, or indifferent, maybe even negative.

They may want to know how they can help. They might become overprotective. Or they might just leave you to get on with your job.

Some of them might know nothing about MS. Others may have their own ideas about how it'll affect you, based on what they've seen with other people or in the media.

You might find you have to remind them to focus on you and what you can do, not your MS. Or remind them to ask you first rather than just assume you can't do something.

It can help if they know more about MS. You could bring in copies of our booklet 'What is MS?'.

If you don't feel comfortable answering their questions, suggest they call the MS Help Hub on **0808 800 8000** or visit **mssociety.org.uk**

If the company you work for has a disabled employees group or network, they might support you with people's reactions.

Perhaps the reaction of a manager or someone at work is especially negative. For example, they might make jokes about you. They might question whether you can do your job. You don't have to put up with this.

This kind of behaviour could be classed as harassment or discrimination. That's against the law.

There's more on discrimination and harassment on pages 43–45.

"I've always been open with my colleagues about MS. I even gave them some MS Society literature so they could appreciate exactly what fatigue is and know I'm not lazy.

And I'm sure my manager didn't really want to know about my bladder problems but it was important he understood!"
Dawn

"I had to explain the finer details of MS to some of my Territorial Army colleagues, who were talking behind my back about how I'd have a fit and kill them all. Once I'd explained that MS doesn't cause seizures, and that I'd never put them at risk, it was fine."
Richard

"My boss has been very supportive. I've had time off for appointments. I'm now based on the ground floor so don't have to use the stairs."
Claire

Support to help you at work

There may be other support available from your employer, so it's worth talking to them about what they can offer you.

To get this support, you need to have told your employer about your MS. If you haven't, this will limit how much support you can get.

Reasonable adjustments

A reasonable adjustment is a change the law says your employer has to make.

It could be a change to your job or where you work. It should prevent you being at a disadvantage compared to a non-disabled person.

Your right to ask for reasonable adjustments is covered by the Equality Act 2010 and, if you're in Northern Ireland, by the Disability Discrimination Act.

There's no limit to how many of these adjustments you can ask for, or how often you can ask for them.

It's not down to you to suggest what adjustments should be made – but a good employer should ask you if you have any ideas.

If you do suggest something, your employer should consider whether it's reasonable and would help you.

Your employer can't ask you to pay for reasonable adjustments.

What kinds of reasonable adjustment can I ask for?

This depends on what you do, and how your MS affects you. Here are some examples:

Changes to the job, such as:

- more breaks in the day
- extra time to get things done
- extra training for things that are new to you
- being given more admin work and less travel
- being given things in writing, not just verbally
- using taxis instead of public transport to get to and from meetings

- flexible or reduced working hours, including time off for medical appointments

Changes to where you work, such as:

- a quiet place to rest for short periods during the day
- a chair to sit on
- working from home
- moving your work station away from a source of heat, or closer to a toilet
- a car parking space near the entrance to work
- giving you voice recognition software, or an adapted keyboard or mouse
- changes to the workplace layout to make it more accessible

Changes to how you're treated at work, such as:

- letting you have a phased return to work after extended sick leave
- flexibility with your sickness rate (that's how many days you can have off sick before it becomes an issue or you no longer get paid)
- your employer letting you have disability leave

The 'Understanding your work situation' form in our online employment toolkit can help you think about where you might need reasonable adjustments.

What's 'reasonable'?

Whether an adjustment is reasonable will depend on where you work and what you do. Your employer can take into account:

- how much difference it'll make
- the cost
- how practical it is to make it happen
- what kind of business you work in
- the size of the business
- what money, equipment and people the business has
- how long you have worked there or are likely to work there

The government's Access to Work (see page 18) programme won't

pay for reasonable adjustments themselves.

But they can pay for an adjustment if it costs more than is reasonable for your employer to pay.

Once you've agreed any reasonable adjustments with your employer, it's a good idea to keep a written record of them.

Adjustments should be brought in without too much of a delay.

The 'Workplace Adjustment Agreement' in our online toolkit can help you record any adjustments.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has detailed guidance on these adjustments. Search their website **equalityhumanrights.com** for 'reasonable adjustments'.

If you've not told your employer you have MS, they still have a duty to put reasonable adjustments in place if they can see you need them.

For example, if you use a stick for walking, and your employer can see you find stairs difficult, they should arrange things so that you don't need to use the stairs.

It may be harder to have reasonable adjustments put in place if your employer doesn't know you have MS. This is especially likely if you have invisible symptoms like fatigue.

Research shows people often leave asking for adjustment until they're really struggling – when it may be too late.

Access to Work

Access to Work is a government-funded service. It offers financial support to help people who are disabled or have long-term health conditions to get into work or stay in it.

How does it work?

You can contact Access to Work through your local Jobcentre Plus, or directly through **gov.uk/access-to-work**.

Once you've contacted them, you'll be given your own adviser. They'll work with you and your employer to work out what help you need, and how best to meet that need. This is often done over the phone. Sometimes they go to someone's workplace to do an assessment.

As the employee, you must contact Access to Work. Your employer or a health care professional can't apply for you.

"I heard about Access to Work through my occupational therapist. I was surprised to find I was eligible, even though I'm self-employed. They cover all my taxis, so I can go out to meetings or see clients."
Dominic

Because your employer is involved in arranging support from Access to Work, they'll need to know that you have MS.

What kinds of things will Access to Work pay for?

Access to Work can help pay for any extra equipment or support you need in order to be able to do your job.

This can include:

- adaptations to the equipment you use at work
- special equipment
- fares to and from work if you can't use public transport or drive
- a support worker or job coach to help you in your workplace
- disability awareness training for people where you work
- a communicator at a job interview
- the cost of moving your equipment if you change location or job

Access to Work can't be used to pay for equipment someone would normally need in order to do their job, regardless of whether they're disabled or have a health condition.

It also can't be used to pay for a 'reasonable adjustment', unless it costs more than would be reasonable for your employer to pay.

What you get will depend on your circumstances. It doesn't affect any other financial support you may get, and you won't have to pay it back.

Depending on the size of where you work and how long you've worked there, your employer may be asked to pay towards the cost.

There's a limit on how much you can get in grants from Access to Work.

If your grant was given or reviewed between April 2018 and the end of March 2019, the most you can claim each year is £57,200.

Each year this figure will change. Visit our website or call the MS Help Hub for the current limit.

Find more information about Access to Work by searching on the **gov.uk** and **nidirect.gov.uk** websites.

Disability Rights UK also has a factsheet about it at **disabilityrightsuk.org/access-work**

The Department for Work and Pensions has made a short video that explains Access to Work. Watch it by going to **youtube.com** and searching for 'access to work DWP'.

Read about how Access to Work helped keep Richard in his farming job on page 22.

"Access to Work supplies me with taxis to and from work because I can't walk enough to use public transport."
Dawn

HONDA
FOURTRAX
HONDA

“I use an FES device, which was paid for by Access to Work”

Richard explains how the scheme helped him carry on working.

I grew up on a farm and have worked in agriculture most of my life. When, after 20 years of unexplained symptoms, my MS was finally diagnosed five years ago, I was working for a company buying and selling cattle and driving 50,000 miles a year.

I blamed the driving for my problems, but it was the MS. Around the same time, I went back to work on a farm and my plan was to wind down gradually and retire, but the MS had other ideas. I have to continue working for a few more years because I need the money.

I have drop foot syndrome and I use an FES (functional electrical stimulation) device, which was paid for by the Access to Work scheme.

I had one before, paid for by my local health board, but they would only fund a wired system. I need a wireless system so I can walk around without tripping up so much.

My boss, who I’ve known for many years, has been very understanding. It’s hard to change the routine on a farm – things need to be done at certain times – but wherever possible things are done flexibly to suit me.

He got me a quad bike, so I now chase the cows around and fetch them in on that! And, two years ago, another worker was taken on to take the pressure off me. I use his young legs to do the jobs I can’t do.

Occupational therapists

Occupational therapists (OTs) help people take part in everyday life as independently as possible.

Some OTs specialise in supporting people in work. They suggest ways to overcome, or manage better, any MS symptoms that affect you at work. These could be physical, invisible or emotional.

An OT can help you work out which reasonable adjustments you need, or which equipment or adaptations could help you with your job.

An OT can help with:

- **Managing your fatigue:** an OT can explain the effects of fatigue to your employer. They can look at your job and give your employer advice on different ways you might work. They might suggest changes to your work hours and rest periods, so that fatigue has less impact on your work. An OT can help you find ways of saving energy so that your work doesn't suffer.
- **The layout of where you work:** an OT can work with your employer to find the best place for you to work. This could be somewhere that helps you make the most of your energy, or get to the toilet easily. It could be a move to a quieter area to help you concentrate better.
- **Equipment and adaptations:** an OT can suggest physical adaptations that might help you at work, like handrails, electric doors, or fitting a ramp for a scooter.

OTs work in the NHS and in social care services. Some may be able to visit you at work.

Your GP, neurologist, MS nurse or other care professional can refer you to an OT. You can also find one privately through the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (details on page 55).

Occupational health

Occupational health looks at health and work, and how one affects the other.

Some companies have an occupational health department or offer staff access to an

occupational health service.

If your workplace has this, you might find it helpful to see an occupational health doctor or nurse when you start a new job, or if you've had a relapse.

To get occupational health support, your employer will need to know about your MS.

If your employer has an occupational health department, you may want to tell them about your MS first.

The occupational health adviser shouldn't tell anyone else about your MS unless you say that's OK.

If where you work doesn't have an occupational health department, you can contact the Fit for Work helpline for advice if you live in England and Wales on **0800 032 6235**. More details are on page 55.

In Scotland you can contact Working Health Services Scotland. Their details are on page 55.

Northern Ireland doesn't have a specialist occupational health service, but you can contact Disability Action, details on page 52.

If you have an occupational health appointment, you may want to ask a health worker, like your MS nurse, to go with you.

An occupational health adviser will have some general knowledge about MS, but a health worker who knows more about you will be able to give more specific advice about symptoms that affect you.

Time off work

Having MS can mean you need to take more time off work than you did before due to appointments, relapses or the day-to-day effects of living with MS.

You may be worried about the impact this has on your work. This might be especially true if where you work places sanctions on people who take too much time off.

If your employer knows about your MS, they may be discriminating against you if they treat you unfairly just because your MS means you take extra time off.

If you're self-employed, you may have other questions, such as how you're going to keep the business going when you have time off. These are covered in the section on self-employment on page 35.

Taking time off for appointments

You don't have an automatic right to time off for medical appointments. But you can ask for time off to go to them as one of your reasonable adjustments (see pages 16-17 'Support to help you at work').

If you work shifts, you could ask for these to be arranged so you don't have to work when you've got an appointment.

If your employer has a disability leave policy (see below), time off for appointments may be included in the policy.

It's a good idea to check your employer's policies to find out whether any time off for medical appointments is paid or unpaid.

Sick leave and disability leave

Some employers have disability leave policies, which outline how they treat time off related to a disability.

If your employer doesn't have a disability leave policy, they may be discriminating against you if they

treat you unfairly because of time off you had because of your MS.

Examples could be using this to make decisions about promotions, bonuses or redundancy. There's more on your rights on page 43.

If you have to take time off sick because of your MS, you may want to talk to your employer about how they record this time off.

For example, a reasonable adjustment could be that time you have off because of MS isn't counted when adding up how much sick leave you've taken.

If your employer has a disability leave policy and your absence is planned – for example, to attend an appointment – this may be recorded as disability leave.

Fit notes and sick pay

If you're ill for more than seven days (including non-working days), you must give your employer a note from your GP or a hospital doctor (if you're in hospital).

Disability leave

This can cover planned or unplanned time off, medical appointments, recovery time (for example after a relapse) or time needed to deal with treatment side effects.

You don't need to have a disability you can see to have this kind of leave. Just having MS is defined as a disability under the Equality Act 2010 which covers Wales, Scotland and England.

Good employers record this leave separately from sick leave. It's an example of a reasonable adjustment. Not all work places have disability leave but you could still ask for it as a reasonable adjustment.

If you have time off because of sickness that's not related to your MS, this should be recorded as sick leave in the usual way.

This is called a 'fit note'. You still need this even if your employer knows you have MS and your absence is because of MS.

For more on this visit the **gov.uk** website and search for 'fit notes'.

A fit note has in it information about why you're not at work. This is something you should be aware of if you haven't already told your employer about your MS.

Your doctor can give advice in the note about whether you'd be fit to go back to work on different hours or with other adjustments in place.

If you're an employee (that is, you're not self-employed), you should get some form of sick pay while you're ill. Your employer's sick leave policy will tell you what you're entitled to.

This may be Statutory Sick Pay (see page 57), or your employer may have an occupational or contractual sick pay scheme.

To get Statutory Sick Pay you must be off work sick for four or more days in a row (including non-working days). You can get it for up to 28 weeks. After that you can claim Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

The law says you can't be given less than the statutory amount. In 2018 this was £92 a week.
You might get more if your company has a sick pay scheme (or 'occupational scheme'). Check your contract.

For more information visit the **gov.uk** website and search for 'sick pay'.

If you're self-employed, you can't claim sick pay.

If you're self-employed and no longer able to work, you can claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

There's more on ESA in our booklet 'Claiming Employment and Support Allowance'.

Return to work

No matter how long you've been off, you may need extra support when you go back.

Some employers have policies for managing your return to work. If they don't, you might want to meet with your employer before you go back.

You can then talk about what arrangements will be in place. This would be especially helpful if you're dealing with new symptoms.

Use this time to talk through any new reasonable adjustments you'll need, and to develop a plan for how you'll go back to your job.

If your employer has an occupational health team, they may be able to help you with this.

It might help to return to work gradually, with a phased return to work. This is included as an option on the fit note.

A phased return means you start out doing fewer hours each week than normal. Then you build it up over a few weeks until you're back up to your usual hours (or the new hours agreed with your employer as a reasonable adjustment).

Building up your hours over alternate days or starting work later often helps with fatigue.

If this sounds helpful, ask your employer about a phased return to work, and whether they have a set time frame for this to happen.

The 'Return to work after time off' form can help you with planning a return to work.

If where you work doesn't have a return to work policy, you and your employer may want to agree a plan in case you have to take a long period of time off sick.

This might include details of how often you'll be in contact with your employer, and whether you're happy for them to contact you.

The 'Workplace Adjustment Agreement' in our online toolkit can help you keep a record of what you agree.

H & W

Looking for work

The Equality Act (or Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland) protects you against discrimination when you look for work.

These laws limit what a potential employer can ask you about a disability or health condition, when they can ask you and what they can do with this information.

All the same, if you're looking for work you may be worried about whether your MS will affect your chances of finding a job. Here we cover some questions you might have about MS and job hunting.

Of course, for some people giving up work may be the right option. We cover some of the issues around giving up work for health reasons on pages 39 to 40.

What is an employer allowed to ask?

A potential employer can ask you about disability during the recruitment process. But they can only ask you for one of the following reasons:

- to check you can do the key parts of the job (taking into account any reasonable adjustments that could be made)
- to find out if you need any extra help, such as removing any barriers or disadvantages you have because of your disability
- for equal opportunities monitoring. This should be done anonymously, as part of the application process

They can also ask to support 'positive action in recruitment'. This is something an employer does to increase the numbers of people from under-represented groups working for them.

For example, you and another candidate could both be equally qualified for a job. But they can offer it to you – as a disabled person – if the numbers of

disabled people working there are lower than they should be.

If they ask, do I have to tell them about my MS?

Before you're offered a job, they can only ask you for one of the reasons mentioned earlier.

If they ask for any other reason, or if they ask other questions about your health, it may be unlawful. If this happens, you don't have to answer their questions.

If a potential employer asks you for any other reason than those listed opposite, you may have grounds to complain. See page 48 for information on raising a grievance.

Should I tell them, even if I don't have to?

This is something people with MS ask themselves when job hunting. They worry that if they tell a possible employer they have MS, there'll be less chance that they get the job.

For this reason, many people choose to wait until they've been offered a job before telling their employer about their MS. It's a personal decision whether you say you have MS

Before making up your mind, you may want to think these over:

- Will you need to ask for reasonable adjustments to be made? Most employers will appreciate being told before you start work. It gives them time to put reasonable adjustments in place.
- Are your symptoms obvious? It may be better to explain what's causing them, rather than allowing an employer to jump to their own conclusions.
- Even if you have few symptoms and don't need to ask for reasonable adjustments, you may still want to tell a employer in case things change in the future.

You're protected against discrimination because of your MS. But discrimination is harder to prove when you're job hunting than when you're actually in a job.

If you do tell an employer about your MS after you've been offered a job and they then withdraw the job offer, this could be discrimination.

There's more on what to do if you think you've been treated unfairly on page 47.

How do I find disability-friendly employers?

If you know you'll need reasonable adjustments or time off for medical appointments, finding an employer who'll support you may be important to you.

It can be difficult to know what the culture of an organisation is like before you start working there.

But there are some ways to tell if it may be disability-friendly. Look for the 'Disability Confident' logo on job adverts.

Being in this government scheme means an employer wants to recruit and retain disabled people and people with health conditions.

If you can get information about employee benefits, check that it includes a disability leave policy, or if the employer is a member of the Business Disability Forum.

If they are, they've made a commitment to supporting disabled employees.

The Business Disability Forum website lists its members, or you can contact them and ask for this (details on page 54).

“I’ll be honest. Getting a job wasn’t easy”

Gillian talks about applying for a job with MS.

When I was diagnosed in 2003, I was working as an NHS speech and language therapist. My boss and colleagues were very understanding but, after five years, it started to become clear that clinical work was too physically demanding for me.

A very wise occupational health adviser told me to think about the long term and to retrain so I could get a more desk-based job.

I’ll be honest, getting a job wasn’t easy. When I applied for jobs and revealed my MS, I didn’t get a single interview - even though I met all the essential criteria. A colleague advised me to stop mentioning it. I’d always thought it was best to be honest and upfront, but I took her advice and I didn’t reveal my MS on the job application for my current job.

In fact, I didn’t tell my boss until I’d been in the job for a year. I don’t want it to define me. I suppose I wanted to prove myself to him first, so he knew that I was a hard worker and trustworthy, and that MS wouldn’t hold me back. When I told him, he already knew! He has been fantastic.

Canon
EOS
550D

Self-employment

Self-employment may be an option for you. It can give you the flexibility to plan your work around your health.

But it's not without risks. If you choose to become self-employed, you need to be sure you can keep things going if your MS means you can't work.

Where can I get support to become self-employed?

There are a few places you can get support from to help you become self-employed. Not all will be geared up to helping people with long-term conditions like MS.

The New Enterprise Allowance can help you start your own business or develop it if you're already self-employed.

You can be given a mentor to advise you, an allowance for up to 26 weeks, or a loan to help with start-up costs.

You might qualify if you're over 18 and:

- you or your partner get Universal Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance
- you get Income Support and you're a lone parent, sick or disabled

Find out more at **gov.uk/moving-from-benefits-to-work/starting-your-own-business**

If you're not receiving benefits, contact your local Chamber of Commerce to find out what support is available in your area. Or you could get in touch with one of the organisations on page 56.

For more information check out **gov.uk/working-for-yourself**

If you're in Northern Ireland, visit **nidirect.gov.uk/articles/starting-your-own-business**

Is funding available?

There's no funding specifically to help people with MS become self-employed. But there are general sources of funding, mostly start-up loans.

One of the organisations on page 56 should help you find the right funding for your business.

The New Enterprise Allowance can give you a weekly allowance or a loan to help with costs.

You can also get funding from Access to Work to help with the cost of specialist equipment, support workers and travel. See page 18 for more information about Access to Work.

What if I can't work anymore?

The lack of a regular income is one of the downsides of being self-employed. Add to that the uncertainty of living with an unpredictable condition like MS, and it may seem too much of a risk.

But there are ways you can manage this risk. You can build flexibility into your business planning, so that the business can keep going even if you're not well enough to work.

This might be through making it the kind of business that can be put on hold when you can't work. Or it might be through employing people who can do the work for you when you can't.

A business adviser at one of the organisations on pages 56 might help with planning this.

If you have Access to Work funding to pay for a support worker, bear in mind that their role is to support you when you're at work. They might keep things ticking over for a short time if you're ill, but they can't do your work for you.

Can I claim any benefits or sick pay?

If you're self-employed, you won't be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay. You may be entitled to claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Find more information about ESA in our booklet 'Claiming ESA', and about the range of benefits you might qualify for in our booklet 'Benefits and MS'.

If you're claiming ESA, you're allowed to work a limited number of hours per week, as long as you don't earn over a certain amount. This is known as 'permitted work'.

If, for example, you're recovering from a relapse, this means you can build up the number of hours you're working without losing out on financial support.

The rules around permitted work are complicated, so you may want to speak to a Disability Employment Adviser at your local Jobcentre Plus to find out what you can and can't do.

Some self-employed people take out income protection insurance. This will replace part of their income if they can't work for a while.

This is only an option if you already had income protection insurance before you were diagnosed with MS. It's very difficult to take out this kind of insurance after being diagnosed. In the insurer's eyes, it's more of a risk for them that they'll have to pay out at some stage.

There's more on insurance in our booklet 'Insurance and MS'.

You'll find how to get our booklets on page 58.

Cutting your hours, retraining or retiring

Even with reasonable adjustments in place, you may find you can't do your current job anymore.

This doesn't mean you have to give up working. There are a number of different options to explore before reaching that decision. We cover some below, such as reducing your hours, moving to another position and retraining.

Of course, for some people giving up work may be the right option. We cover some of the issues around giving up work for health reasons on pages 39 to 40.

Reducing your hours

You may find you can carry on in your current job if you cut back on your hours. Not everyone will be in the position to do this, but it may be worth discussing this option with your employer to see if you can. For example, you might be able to go from a five day week to a four day week. Or you could ask for a job share arrangement.

Be aware that reducing your hours will have an impact on your money situation, and may affect your workload. Before deciding to reduce your hours, there are some things to think about:

- How much money do I need? Will I have enough if I cut down my hours?
- If I reduce my hours, will my workload be less? Or will I have to do the same work in less time?
- How might it affect my pension?
- Can I still meet the demands of my job on reduced hours?

The Money Advice Service has an online budget planner at: **moneyadviceservice.org.uk**

Moving to another position

Another option is moving to another position in the same organisation. For example, if your job involves lots of manual work, you may want to move to a desk job.

Whether you can do this depends on things like the size of the organisation you work for, whether there are any other jobs you could do, and your skills and experience.

Use the 'Strengths and weaknesses' form in our online toolkit to help work out what you do well, and what opportunities you may have.

Retraining

If your MS means you can't do the type of work you've been doing, but you feel you can still work, another option might be to retrain.

The careers service in your part of the UK can help you decide what you'd like to do. They can help you work out what training you need and how to pay for it. See page 56 for their details.

If you need to give up your current job to retrain, you may qualify for benefits. Speak to your local Citizens Advice or other benefits advice agency before making any major decisions.

You'll find lots more information about benefits in our booklet 'Benefits and MS'.

If you're claiming out-of-work benefits, you can also get support from a Disability Employment Advisor at your local Jobcentre Plus to help you find a new job or gain new skills.

These advisors no longer exist in Northern Ireland but there is Workable (NI). This offers a flexible range of long-term support to help people with disabilities who have a lot of barriers to employment, to find and keep work. Find out more at **nidirect.gov.uk/articles/workable-ni**

There are some organisations that help disabled people find work, such as Specialist Employability Support. See page 56 for details.

Ill-health retirement

For some people, the decision to give up work completely can be a

hard one to make.

Work can be a large part of who you are. To give up work can feel like losing a part of yourself and can be difficult to deal with.

If you're in this situation and want to talk to someone about how you're feeling, call the MS Help Hub (details on page 58).

What the definition of 'ill-health retirement' is will be different from one pension scheme to another. Sometimes it means you can't do your normal job because you're physically or mentally ill, or your condition seriously reduces the amount you can earn.

Some schemes say you have to be unable to do any job – not just your current one – to qualify for ill-health retirement.

If ill-health retirement is an option where you work, it's something you should only think of doing after exploring all other options. Before making a decision, talk it through with someone. This could be:

- your union representative (if you're in a union)
- an occupational health adviser
- or your pensions department (if you're in an occupational pension scheme)

Ill-health retirement might be an option to look into instead of a cut in your hours or taking a lower status job. That will depend on your pension contributions and your policy. Get advice before deciding.

During the ill-health retirement process, you'll be assessed to see if you can or can't work again. It would be useful to talk to your MS medical team so that they hear what you have to say, as they'll be providing medical evidence.

If you talk about ill-health retirement with your employer, you may want to make sure all conversations are covered by the principle of 'without prejudice'.

This means that – unless you give them permission to do so – your employer can't use these conversations as evidence that you accept you can't do your job.

Find more about retiring early because of your MS here: **moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/early-retirement-because-of-illness-or-disability**

Group occupational pension scheme or group insurance policy

It may be useful to check if your current or future employer has a group insurance policy. If they do, and you decide to stop working, you could apply for ill-health retirement and still get an income.

Remember: the decision to retire on ill-health grounds is yours. If you feel you can still work, but your employer is pressuring you to retire, you don't have to retire. See page 50 for what you can do.

Money and benefits

Worried about the impact giving up work will have on your money situation? Help is available.

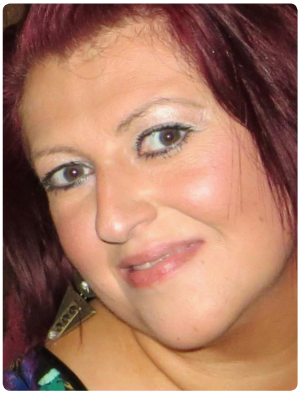
If you've paid into a private pension scheme, you may be able to take your pension early for ill-health reasons. The rules on this depend on the scheme, so speak to the pension scheme administrator.

You will not be able to claim your State Pension until you reach State Pension age. If you're not sure what age you'll get yours, check the calculator at **gov.uk/state-pension-age**

If you can no longer work, you may qualify for benefits, including Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). The benefits you can claim depend on your income, savings, the National Insurance contributions you've paid, or any combination of those.

The rules are very complicated, so get advice from your local Citizens Advice or other benefits agency.

Find out information about the range of benefits available in our booklets 'Benefits and MS' and 'Claiming ESA'.



“This isn’t working for me”

Lexi talks about moving to a more suitable position within the organisation

When I was diagnosed with MS six years ago, was an office administrator. Around the same time, I was made redundant – nothing to do with my MS – and found myself out of work for 10 months.

Although my mobility was good, I worried about whether I could get another job and my health did deteriorate with the stress. Fortunately, I got a job at a DIY store, even though I was upfront with them about having a disability.

My administrative role was really stressful. My cognitive skills became a problem. I said to my boss: ‘This isn’t working because of my MS.’ The company didn’t want to lose me and suggested I’d be more suited to working on the shop floor. I agreed, despite a slight salary drop. I thought I’d do it for a short time, but I loved working on the tills, talking to customers, and so I’ve stayed.

They’ve really looked after me, giving me a stool, so I can sit down, varying my hours and letting me take extra breaks when I’m really fatigued.

My colleagues have been fantastically understanding, sometimes they’re a bit too supportive – they treat me like I’m made of glass! I’m one of the lucky ones.

Your rights

You're protected against discrimination by the Equality Act 2010 if you live in England, Scotland or Wales. If you live in Northern Ireland, you're covered by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

MS is a named condition in both Acts. This means you're protected from the moment you were diagnosed, no matter how your MS affects you.

"Know your rights. It gives you that little bit more confidence to not feel guilty about asking for things that, at the end of the day, are going to make your life easier. If your life's easy you're going to work better, which makes the company's life easier."
Trishna

Both Acts make it against the law to discriminate in all aspects of employment. That covers recruitment, selection, training, promotion, redundancy and dismissal. You'll find below a summary of the types of discrimination that's not allowed.

Find out more detailed information from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (in England, Scotland and Wales) or the Equality Commission (in Northern Ireland).

Harassment

This is when an employer allows or participates in 'unwanted conduct' related to your disability. To count as harassment, this unwanted conduct would violate your dignity or create a hostile or intimidating working environment. For example, if your colleagues made jokes about your symptoms, this might be seen as harassment.

Direct discrimination

This is when, because of your disability, you're treated less favourably than someone without

a disability would be treated in the same circumstances.

For example, if you were overlooked for promotion because your employer assumed your MS means you can't do the job, this would be seen as direct discrimination.

If your employer fails to let you have a 'reasonable adjustment', that counts as discrimination, too (but not if the adjustment you want is judged to be unreasonable).

Indirect discrimination

This is when the way an organisation or service works is unfair. The discrimination happens because the standard practice of the organisation is unfair when applied to the disabled person.

For example, a company doesn't provide job applications in large print. This could be unfair for anyone with sight problems.

In Northern Ireland there are no special laws that cover indirect discrimination.

Discrimination arising from a disability or disability-related discrimination

This is when someone's discriminated against because of something connected to their disability, not because of the disability itself.

For example, if you took time off because of your MS and were dismissed because you'd had more sick days than other people, this could be seen as discrimination arising from a disability, or disability-related discrimination.

'Discrimination arising from a disability' applies in England, Wales and Scotland. 'Disability-related discrimination' applies in Northern Ireland. They're basically the same, although the exact details are different.

Disability discrimination by association

The Equality Act also protects people who 'have an association' (connection) with a disabled person – like a partner or carer. A person with an association

can bring a claim for direct discrimination or harassment.

Here's an example. Your partner's company is having a work social event but your partner is told not to bring you because they know you have MS. But other staff are encouraged to bring their partners. This could be seen as discrimination by association.

Disability discrimination by association isn't covered by the DDA in Northern Ireland.

Victimisation

This is when you're treated badly because you make a claim or complaint about discrimination.

Confidentiality and privacy

Confidentiality

All employees – whether or not they have a health condition or disability – have the right to confidentiality at work. Laws place strict limits on what an employer can do with personal information you've given them. These are:

- the General Data Protection Regulation (from May 2018)
- the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)
- the Human Rights Act (1998)

In general, your employer isn't allowed to share personal information about you without your permission. If your employer does have to share information about the workforce as a whole, for example, for health and safety purposes, they should do this in a way that maintains the privacy of individual workers.

This means that if you've told your employer you have MS, they're not allowed to tell anyone else unless you say they can. If this happens check out the section 'what to do if you're not being treated fairly' for what you can do.

Privacy

You may be concerned about privacy at work. You may need to make phone calls, use email or the internet for things to do with your MS, like book an appointment .

Many employers have a policy outlining what they consider to be fair email, internet or phone use, and how they monitor their staff's

use of this. If your employer doesn't have a policy, ask what you are and aren't allowed to do.

In general, your employer is allowed to monitor the general internet, email and phone use of all staff, as long as they tell them what they're doing and why. But they shouldn't be monitoring communication that's clearly personal, unless they have a good reason for doing so (for example, they suspect something criminal is happening).

You may want to talk to your employer if you have any concerns about privacy at work. If you feel your privacy has been breached, things you can do are outlined in the next section.

Can an employer ever justify discrimination?

An employer may be able to justify some forms of discrimination. It depends on what they're doing, and why.

Direct discrimination – treating you unfairly because of your MS – can never be justified. But an employer may be able to justify other forms of discrimination, such as indirect discrimination or discrimination arising from a disability. This is as long as they can prove it's helping them pursue the aims of the business, and that this is necessary and appropriate in the circumstances.

Here's an example. You work for a small company. Everyone has to be at work by 9am every day. You find travelling during the rush hour makes your fatigue worse, so want to start later. Your employer says you can't as 9am is the busiest time of day for them and they need all their staff at this time. Without you they'd be short-staffed and might lose business.

The law around this is complicated. Get advice from one of the organisations listed at the end of this booklet.

What to do if you're not being treated fairly

If you feel you're not being treated fairly, there's usually something you can do about it.

This section outlines the steps you can take if you feel you've been treated unfairly at work, or while looking for work.

In work

Not everyone with MS has a good experience at work. Maybe your line manager has started treating you differently since you told them about your MS. Or perhaps your colleagues think you're getting preferential treatment, or that you're not making a full contribution to the team.

Your company may have a policy for dealing with these issues. If not, this section outlines what such a policy normally includes.

You can download the Acas Code of Practice – Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures from the Acas website. Get more detailed information and support from Acas (in England, Scotland or Wales), Labour Relations Agency (in Northern Ireland) and the Equality Advisory and Support Service.

What is Acas?

Acas is the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. It's an independent, government-funded organisation that covers England, Scotland and Wales. It works with employers and employees to solve problems and conflicts in the workplace. Find advice on their website, or contact their helpline (details on page 54).

If you're in Northern Ireland, the Labour Relations Agency has a similar role.

Talk informally

Whatever your concerns, talk them over with the people involved. An informal chat is usually the best starting point. This can solve a lot of problems, and help avoid bad feeling between you and the others involved.

Raise a grievance

If talking informally doesn't bring the results you wanted, the next step is to raise a grievance in writing. Your employer will probably have a grievance procedure that you should follow.

If they don't have one, write a formal letter to your employer. This should give details of what you've experienced. Say what happened and when, and ask your employer to look into it.

Once you've raised your grievance formally, your employer should arrange a meeting with you to talk it over. You can have a colleague with you at this meeting, or a union representative if you're a member of a union. If your grievance is dismissed by your employer, you must be given the right to appeal against the decision.

If you want to make a claim in an employment tribunal, you have to do this within three months of the act that you feel was discrimination or that you feel was a failure to do something for you. There's no three month deadline for raising a grievance.

There's lots of advice if you feel you've been treated unfairly in the 'Disputes and problems at work' section of the Acas website.

Do I have to raise a grievance?

You can go straight to an employment tribunal without raising a grievance (for example, if you're reaching the three month time limit for making a claim). But if you do this, any compensation you get from the tribunal may be reduced by up to 25% because you didn't follow the Acas Code of Practice.

Find it at **acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1364** You'll find more information under 'Raising an issue at work'.

They also have information in the 'Disability discrimination' section of their site at **acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1859**

Employment tribunal

If you're not happy with the result of the grievance, or if you don't get a response, you can issue a claim for disability discrimination in an employment tribunal. In Northern Ireland this is called an industrial tribunal.

There's more about tribunal costs on the **gov.uk** website. Search for 'employment tribunal'. If you're in England, Scotland or Wales, you need a certificate from the Acas Early Conciliation service before you can issue a claim in an employment tribunal.

When you contact the service, Acas will offer to work with you and your employer to resolve the dispute without going to a tribunal. You don't have to take them up on this offer. They can still issue you with a certificate so that you can go to a tribunal.

If you do use the service and still can't reach an agreement with your employer, Acas will issue you a certificate that allows you to go to tribunal.

Remember: the deadline for issuing a claim in an employment tribunal is three months from when the discrimination took place.

Using the Early Conciliation service doesn't affect this timescale. The clock is paused when you start the process. It starts again if you can't reach an agreement and then decide to go to tribunal.

You'll need help if you go to a tribunal. Your local Citizens Advice can advise you.

Looking for work

To prove you've been discriminated against when looking for work, you need strong evidence of why you didn't get the job. This may be hard to get.

If you feel you can get the evidence, the process you follow is the same as if you were in work. You can try asking questions of the employer, following the Acas guidance on asking and responding to questions of discrimination in the workplace (see 'Raise a grievance' on page 48).

If you're not happy with the responses you get, or if you don't get a response at all, you may be able to take the issue to an employment tribunal.

For more on what to do if you feel you've been discriminated against during the recruitment process, contact Acas or the Equality Advisory and Support Service (details on pages 53 and 54).

My boss is telling me I can no longer do my job.

If you feel you can still do your job, but your employer is telling you that you can't, you may be able to challenge this.

You need to show there are reasonable adjustments which could be made to help you do your job. But they haven't been put in place. You may need evidence, like an occupational health report.

If your employer sacks you without making reasonable adjustments, this may be discrimination. You could take action against your employer following the process on page 48.

“They bullied me when I was at my most vulnerable”

Barbara talks about how she won her battle for unfair dismissal.

It was a devastating blow when I was diagnosed with highly active MS. But what happened next came as an even bigger and more painful shock. Overnight, my work colleagues turned on me and began a systematic bullying campaign to get me out of my job.

One morning, my employer sacked me on the spot, telling me it was for my own safety – something they later denied. I was gutted. It was two months before Christmas. I was a divorced single mother with a young son. For eight weeks, I sank into depression. Then I got angry.

A friend recommended an employment lawyer who had MS too. She agreed to take on my case. We lodged an employment tribunal claim for unfair dismissal. They’d broken every rule in the book.

They bullied me when I was at my most vulnerable. They took away my job and made my life hell. Then they denied me time to come to terms with my diagnosis. They stole my grieving period from me.

I was looking forward to my day in court but they agreed to pay me off instead. It wasn’t about the money; I wanted an admission of liability for their outrageous behaviour. I wanted to prove a point. The first offer was an insult. After some negotiation, we settled on a figure I was happy with.

Useful organisations

It can make a real difference if you can find the right people to support you with your MS at work. But it's not always obvious where to look.

Your rights

Citizens Advice

Offers help with welfare rights, housing and disability issues, as well as information about your rights at work. Local offices are listed on the national websites.

England

03444 111 444

citizensadvice.org.uk/england/

Wales

03444 77 20 20

citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/

Scotland

0808 800 9060

citizensadvice.org.uk/scotland/

Find your local office at **cas.org.uk/bureaux**

Northern Ireland

028 9023 1120

citizensadvice.co.uk

Disability Action (Northern Ireland)

Charity with offices in Belfast, Dungannon and Carrickfergus. They work for the rights of people in Northern Ireland with all types of disabilities. They give advice and help people find employment and support them at work.

Telephone **028 9029 7880**
Textphone **028 9029 7882**

Email **hq@disabilityaction.org**

disabilityaction.org

Disability Rights UK

Disability organisation that supports the rights of disabled people. Has information on Access to Work and working with a disability or health condition.

disabilityrightsuk.org

Disability Law Service

Provides free, confidential legal advice to people in England and Wales on employment issues, disability discrimination, benefits appeals, and social welfare. The

MS Society funds an advice service there for people with MS.

020 7791 9800

Email: **msadvice@dls.org.uk**

dls.org.uk

Equality Advisory and Support Service

Freephone helpline giving advice across England, Scotland and Wales on things to do with equality and human rights.

0808 800 0082
0808 800 0084 (Text phone)
www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Equality Commission Northern Ireland

For information about your rights under the Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland.

028 9050 0600
equalityni.org

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Their website has information about your rights under the Equality Act (England, Wales and Scotland). Individual information and advice provided through the Equality, Advisory and Support Service

equalityhumanrights.com

Gov.uk and NI Direct

Government websites with information about benefits, rights, health care, social care and more.

England, Wales and Scotland
gov.uk

Northern Ireland
nidirect.gov.uk

'My MS My Rights, My Choices' project (Wales)

Free, confidential support service (funded until March 2020) for people living with and affected by MS in Wales. It offers information and support on employment rights and welfare benefits (including PIP/ESA claims), ways to manage your MS, accessing treatments, and health and social care services.

Email **Adele.Gilmour@mssociety.org.uk**

0208 438 0715 Mob. 0786 469 1394

Turn2us

An online charity that helps people find out what benefits and grants they qualify for.

turn2us.org.uk

WorkSMART

This website from the Trades Union Congress (TUC), with information about work rights, health, careers and pensions.

worksmart.org.uk/

Employment support

Acas

Independent, government-funded organisation that aims to improve employment relations in England, Scotland and Wales. It works with employers and employees to solve problems and resolve conflicts.

Their website has advice if you feel you've been treated unfairly (look in the 'Disputes and problems at work' section).

Helpline **0300 123 1100**

8am to 6pm Monday to Friday

acas.org.uk

Benefits and Work

This website helps you get benefits you're entitled to. Whether your claim is new or an existing one, the site covers PIP, ESA, and appealing against decisions. A lot of information is free but you need to pay a subscription to see everything.

benefitsandwork.co.uk

Business Disability Forum

National organisation helping employers to recruit and retain disabled employees.

020 7403 3020
businessdisabilityforum.org.uk

Health and Work Support (Northern Ireland)

The Department for Communities helps employers recruit people with health issues or disabilities. It also helps employers to retain them if they become sick or disabled while in employment. Find out more at

nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/employment-support/work-schemes-and-programmes

Labour Relations Agency

Public body with responsibility for improving employment relations in Northern Ireland.

028 9032 1442

lra.org.uk

Pluss

Supports disabled people in England to find work.

0800 334 5525

www.pluss.org.uk

Remploy

Helps disabled people with online advice and guidance on getting and staying in a job.

0300 456 8110

Online advisors available to chat:
8am to 8pm Monday to Friday
9am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday

remploy.co.uk

Shaw Trust

Supports disabled people looking for work who've been referred through their local Jobcentre Plus.

0800 389 0078

shaw-trust.org.uk

Royal College of Occupational Therapists

For information about occupational therapy, as well as how to find an occupational therapist.

020 7357 6480

Email **hello@rcot.co.uk**

rcot.co.uk

Workable (NI)

A programme in Northern Ireland offering long-term support to help people with disabilities find work. Find out more at **nidirect.gov.uk/articles/workable-ni**

Health support

Fit for work (England and Wales)

Free expert and impartial advice to anyone looking for help with issues around health and work.

Advice line 0800 032 6235

(in Welsh 0800 032 6233)

fitforwork.org

Healthy Working Wales

A Welsh Government programme that helps employers, workers and health professionals support people to be fit and healthy so they can stay in work, or return to it after ill-health. Face-to-face, telephone or online support available.

Helpline **02921 674966**

Email: **workplacehealth@wales.nhs.uk**

healthyworkingwales.wales.nhs.uk

Working Health Services Scotland

Advice and health support such as access to physiotherapy, counselling and occupational therapy. This

service is for the self-employed and people in companies with under 250 workers and who feel their ill-health or a health condition is affecting their work.

0800 019 2211

Self-employment and retraining

For help with setting up and running your own business:

National Enterprise Network (England)

01908 605130
nationalenterprisenetwork.org

Northern Ireland Business Info

0800 181 4422
nibusinessinfo.co.uk

Business Gateway (Scotland)

0300 013 4753
bgateway.com

Business Wales

03000 603000
business.wales.gov.uk

National Careers Service (England)

0800 100 900
nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk

Northern Ireland Careers Service

0300 200 7820
nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/careers

My World of Work (Scotland)

0800 917 8000
myworldofwork.co.uk

Careers Wales

0800 028 4844
careerswales.com

Disabled Entrepreneurs Network

Provides a voice and networking opportunities for disabled entrepreneurs.

disabledentrepreneurs.co.uk

Start Up Loans

A government-funded initiative to provide business loans and mentors for entrepreneurs.

startuploans.co.uk

Specialist Employability Support

Intensive support and training to help you into work if you're disabled. You can apply if other employment programmes, such as Access to Work, aren't suitable for you.
Find more at

gov.uk/specialist-employability-support

New words explained

Access to Work – government scheme that provides support for staying in work to people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. It can help pay for transport costs or special equipment

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 – if you live in Northern Ireland, this law protects you from discrimination. Protection starts the day you're diagnosed with MS

disability leave – leave from work that can cover planned or unplanned time off, medical appointments or recovery time (for example after a relapse). It can also cover time needed to deal with treatment side effects. Good employers record it separately from sick leave. It's an example of a **reasonable adjustment.** Not all work places have disability leave but you could still ask for it

Equality Act 2010 – if you live in England, Wales and Scotland, this law protects you from discrimination. Protection starts the day you're diagnosed with MS

occupational health – a team or service that keeps people safe and well at work, physically and mentally. In some companies a special department deals with this, others use an outside service

occupational therapist (OT) – someone who supports you to find ways to do daily tasks and keep your independence. They suggest practical things and changes to where you work or live

reasonable adjustments – changes at work that the law says your employer must make. This stops you being at a disadvantage compared to other people at work

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) – money the law says you must get from your employer for up to 28 weeks (£92 a week in 2018). You must've been off work sick for four or more days in a row (including non-working days). You must be classed as an employee, have done some work for your employer, and earn an average of at least £116 a week. You must tell your employer you're sick before their deadline (or within seven days if they don't have a deadline)

Further information

Resources

Our award winning information resources cover every aspect of living with MS.

To order email **shop@mssociety.org.uk** or visit **mssociety.org.uk/publications**

Employment toolkit

A collection of forms, case studies and best practice examples.
mssociety.org.uk/work-toolkit

MS Help Hub

Through our MS Help Hub anyone affected by MS can get emotional support and information, and access services including:

- MS nurses
- MS benefits adviser
- MS legal adviser
- Moving More with MS service
- Short breaks service

We can give information in different languages through an interpreter service. And by text relay and British Sign Language interpreters.

Find out more about all our services on our website.

Call 0808 800 8000 (Mon–Fri 9am to 5pm except bank holidays)
Email helphub@mssociety.org.uk or get in touch with webchat at mssociety.org.uk

About this resource

This booklet is the result of MS Society-funded research 'Working yet worried 2: Working with employers to ensure employees needs are met', conducted by Dr Joanna Sweetland and Honorary Consultant Neurologist, Diane Playford.

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If you have any comments about this booklet, please send them to **resources@mssociety.org.uk**

Disclaimer: We have made every effort to ensure that the information in this publication is correct. We do not accept liability for any errors or omissions. Seek advice from the sources listed.

Photography

Photography: Amit Lennon (cover and p15), Davie Dunne (p6), Paul Moane (p29) and Simon Rawles (p34).

This resource is also available in large print.

Call **0300 500 8084** or email **shop@mssociety.org.uk**

Contact us

MS Help Hub

Freephone 0808 800 8000
(weekdays 9am–5pm)
helphub@mssociety.org.uk
Webchat at mssociety.org.uk

MS National Centre

0300 500 8084
info@mssociety.org.uk
supportercare@mssociety.org.uk

Online

mssociety.org.uk
facebook.com/MSSociety
twitter.com/mssocietyuk

MS Society Scotland

0131 335 4050
msscotland@mssociety.org.uk

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