

Living with a disability

Whether you're disabled or a disability has affected a member of your family, a mental or physical disability will change your life. As with any major life change, you will face many challenges. Use the tips below to begin to come to terms with your new normal and start living your life with balance, strength and optimism.

Don't allow yourself to be defined by your disability – Define yourself! It's easy to fall into a state of discouragement, even despair. While it's healthy to grieve for your loss, do not allow your grief to consume you or permanently define who you are. Despite the ups and downs inherent to the bereavement process, it will be important ultimately to accept the new you.

Make appropriate accommodations at home – From wheelchair ramps and grab bars to screen readers on your computer and voice-activated controls, home modifications and technologies exist to make life easier. Whenever possible, take advantage of them and optimize your living spaces.

Accept help but strive to become self-sufficient – At first, you will likely need help from others. Accept help with grace, but try not to become dependent on others. What skills do you need to develop? What aspects of your life do you want back? Be creative and willing to adapt. For example, if you're wheelchair-bound and miss doing your own grocery shopping, try using the local shuttle bus and the grocery store's motorized cart, or order your groceries online and have them delivered.

Find meaningful work – Whether you're back on the job or getting ready to return to work, finding meaning in your contributions, either on the job or as a volunteer, can be extremely satisfying. It will also give you a sense of purpose and help you to further develop your independence. Look for ways to make work more meaningful to you. Whether it's a contribution to others, a sense of accomplishment for a job well done, or a feeling of belonging to a larger community, take the time to appreciate the intangible value that work and volunteering bring to your life.

Take care of your mental and physical health – According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), people with disabilities are more likely to report poorer overall health, less access to adequate health care, no access to health insurance, risky behaviors (such as smoking), and not getting health care due to cost. Make mental and physical health your top priority by:

- Paying attention to how you feel
- Getting regular checkups and preventive screenings
- Exercising
- Avoiding cigarettes and illegal substances
- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Sharing any concerns with your health-care provider

Seek inspiration from others

"It is a waste of time to be angry about my disability. One has to get on with life and I haven't done badly. People won't have time for you if you are always angry or complaining" – Stephen Hawking

"I have a Disability yes that's true, but all that really means is I may have to take a slightly different path than you" – Robert. M. Hensel

Living with a disability may not be the path you would have chosen for yourself or a loved one, yet here you are on that path. It's up to you to decide what attitude to adopt, and therefore influence where that path will take you.

Working with a disability

dis-abil-i-ty *noun* \,dis-ə-'bi-lə-tē\

a condition (such as an illness or an injury) that damages or limits a person's physical or mental abilities; the condition of being disabled

The International Labor Organization, an agency of the United Nations, issued a report in 2007, [Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenges of a Disability](#), that challenged the concept that people with disabilities are less productive than their non-disabled counterparts. In fact, the report suggests that they may even be more productive in some jobs than non-disabled people. If you have a mental or physical disability and want to go back to work, take heart - it is possible to excel on the job even with a disability.

Work performance and productivity

A growing body of evidence shows that [workers with disabilities meet or exceed the job performance](#) of co-workers without disabilities. However, that said, working with a disability has its own unique set of challenges. For example, your disability may require reasonable accommodations from your employer or your co-workers may prejudge your abilities based on misconceptions and stereotypes.

Accommodating a disability

When you are ready and able to return to work, your employer may need to make reasonable accommodations for your disability. Under the [Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#) (ADA), reasonable accommodation for qualified workers with a disability "is any change or adjustment to a job or work environment that permits a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the job application process, to perform the essential functions of a job, or to enjoy benefits and privileges of employment equal to those enjoyed by employees without disabilities." An example of a reasonable accommodation is modifying a work schedule or making available adaptive technology such as a screen reader for the visually impaired.

Overcoming stigma at work

While you can't control what others think, you can fight stigma and lay the groundwork for a successful working relationship with others. Unfortunately, many conditions, including mental disorders, epilepsy, deafness, visual impairment, and others remain stigmatized. Some of your co-workers will be compassionate due to their own experiences with mental or physical disabilities, while others will be influenced by myths and misconceptions. It's helpful to be open about your condition. Educating others both with facts and by your actions can make a big difference in how you are perceived.

Your disability doesn't define who you are or what you're capable of, nor should the misperceptions of others. Assuming you're otherwise qualified and ready to return to work with reasonable accommodations, the future has great potential.

Looking for additional support? Your Employee Assistance and Work/Life Program can help through a variety of resources. Call your Employee and Family Assistance and Work/Life Program at **1 866 468-9461**. Visit shepellfgi.com.