

# Vademecum

Back to work

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**Part 2: Practical advice for employers**

## Authors

**Bieri, Manuela.**

*Long Covid Schweiz*

**Dr. Rangelov, Natalie.**

*Altea Long COVID Network*

**Rudolf, Pia. Sulser&Partner AG**

*Case Management und berufliche Integration*

**Scherrer, Florian.**

**Simonet, Arnaud.**

**Utiger, Alexandra.**

*Long Covid Schweiz*



## **Back to work – Part 2: Practical advice for employers when employees with Long COVID return to work**

People affected by Long COVID are faced with a number of different problems. They are frequently restricted by their [illness](#) in all aspects of their [daily life](#), whether during their day-to-day activities or in their relationships, their hobbies or their work. It's important that people affected by Long COVID receive adequate support when returning to work. Exertion intolerance and post exertion malaise (PEM), cognitive impairment or fatigue are the biggest hurdles for affected individuals when returning to work.

Given the complexity of Long COVID, even experienced employers find it challenging to reintegrate those affected into the workplace. This Vademecum provides tips that make it easier for employees and employers to return to work. It answers questions such as "How can employers support those affected?", "How can reintegration be best planned?" or "Who can support employers and those affected?". The first part of the Vademecum explains what Long COVID is and how the syndrome affects working life and the situation of employees.

### **How can employers support those affected?**

#### **Communication**

Arrange an in-depth discussion for employees returning to work after being infected with COVID-19 (even after a long period of time). How does the employee feel? Do they feel completely recovered? Do they still have symptoms? Are there any limits to their ability to perform their role? How can you support them?

Please note: The employee is free to choose not to disclose all of their health-related information. If someone doesn't want to talk about it, don't insist.



*Advice and tips:*

- ✿ **Structure** meetings clearly, and create a pleasant and appreciative atmosphere.
- ✿ Plan **regular discussions**, e.g., on a weekly basis, so you can find out if **the workload is adequate for the affected employee's health**. Show interest, empathy and understanding for any difficulties that arise.
- ✿ You should also coordinate regular meetings **with all** individuals involved in the reintegration process.
- ✿ **Let the team know** about the employee's health situation, ideally together with the affected employee.

Please note: Talk to your employee first to confirm that they agree.

***Plan the return to work together with the affected employees***

Employers can support affected employees by responding to their individual needs and allowing them to adjust their workload. Can the affected person return to their usual workload and working hours, or do their workload and working hours need to be reduced? Does the employee need more flexibility regarding working days or hours? Is the workplace adapted to the new situation or do adjustments need to be made?

*Advice and tips:*

- ✿ Start your return-to-work plans as soon as possible. Depending on the person's state of health, they can start with one hour per week or more. **Simple and structured tasks** without pressure to perform and without shift assignments are suitable for this purpose. You can also talk to the AI/IV office or case manager about this transition.
- ✿ **Spread out** challenging tasks **across different days**. This also means being flexible on the days when the person is working. In some circumstances, a fixed schedule (e.g., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) might not work every week. Define a weekly number of working hours rather than a daily number. A rest day between two working days would be ideal.
- ✿ Only increase your employees' workload in slow and small steps, after consulting with their doctor and the AI/IV office or case manager, as well as the employee. **Don't expect recovery or success in a short period of time**, and plan in the employee's reduced ability to work over a longer period of time.



- ✦ Create **individual** and **flexible work models**, for example, with more and longer breaks, or shorter days. You can also offer the employee to work with a flexible schedule at the workplace. Offering the option to work from home may be helpful because the commute itself saps energy.
- ✦ It can be helpful if someone supports the employee, especially in the initial phase of returning to work. One option is for the affected individual to go to work after their COVID infection as soon as they feel ready, **but in addition to their replacement and without any responsibility**. The replacement worker can continue to work and bear full responsibility. This allows Long COVID sufferers to go about their normal work as long as their strength permits, without the pressure of responsibility and time. If they need a day off, the replacement worker will continue the work.
- ✦ Give your employee **feedback** about **progress and observations**, regardless of how small, in their behavior relating to their work performance.
- ✦ Put any expectations and demands regarding the employee's performance to one side.

### *Practical measures*

It would go beyond the scope of this Vademecum to list practical measures for all possible types of work environment. Creativity and open communication between employers and those affected make things a lot easier.

Here are nonetheless a few practical measures:

- ✦ Set up **quiet areas** where the affected individual can take breaks with no sensory overload. This can also involve allowing the individuals to manage their own **break times**.
- ✦ Reduce accountability for customers and projects, especially if it involves moving to another location or traveling.
- ✦ Support affected individuals by addressing their needs and facilitating adjustments in the **workplace**:
  - ✦ An office/workstation with adjustable light
  - ✦ Avoid noise emissions and the pressure of expectation
  - ✦ **Avoid disturbances** caused by public traffic (sensory overload)



✿ The following adaptations can help relieve pain and reduce mental fatigue or cognitive difficulties:

- Adjustable tables and chairs
- Technical aids such as larger screens, a voice assistant, etc.

✿ Discuss further adjustments directly with affected individuals.

The first phase is purely about being present (therapeutic work training) and trying out the new situation. Please note that the return to work can occur at a very low level (e.g. 2 days per week with 30-min work days each). If there is no subsequent “[crash](#)” within, for example, a month, then it is possible to continue on this basis and slowly increase working hours. On the part of the employer, a lot of patience and support is needed. This is a burden for the employers themselves as well as for the team. Therefore, transparent, continuous communication is very important.

In most cases – provided they are medically well cared for – those affected are accompanied by occupational therapists who support them in terms of their energy balance. Take note: those affected **don't live “only” for work**. It's important that – in addition to reintegration – they also have energy for their social life (social contacts, sports activities, leisure activities, etc.).

### **Is it advisable to return to the same job?**

It should be decided on an individual basis whether it's possible to start at a very low workload (see above). Why? The individual concerned needs energy just to get up, attend to personal hygiene and get dressed – and there is also the commute to work. External influences, especially public transport, can affect the individual (overstimulation) and cost them a lot of energy.

### **Who can support employers and those affected?**

For employers, case management support is recommended. People with Long COVID are their own experts when it comes to their ability to perform. This is precisely why it is also worthwhile to call in a case manager. They can provide support and advice to both individuals with Long COVID and employers. Likewise, case managers can involve all the relevant parties such as doctors, therapists, insurance companies, etc. in the process. Case management can raise



awareness among employers and affected individuals and support those affected in taking small steps, taking breaks, and respecting quiet time ([pacing](#)).

## AI/IV registration

For those affected, AI/IV registration is mandatory. This is because the daily benefits insurance system requires registration, and also because support through case management/job coaching can be requested via AI/IV. The AI/IV supports reentry to work before retirement; therefore, these costs can be covered by the AI/IV, as well as the costs for workplace adjustments, aids, etc. In addition, disability insurance has access to integration workshops. If it's not possible to reintegrate patients in their usual jobs, work training can be arranged through one of these institutions. There, an affected person has the opportunity to start with a low workload or level of attendance, without pressure, and under the best working conditions. AI/IV also supports finding a job that is better adapted to the patient's condition and, under certain circumstances, even retraining.

How insurance companies such as AI/IV, pension funds, etc. will respond to employees with Long COVID is currently an open question. To date, there have been no decision on AI/IV benefits except in isolated cases. It's necessary to observe how the situation develops in how social security providers deal with those affected by Long COVID

## More information

Case management is a specific process for the coordinated handling of complex issues in social, health and insurance sectors. A detailed explanation and definition thereof can be found [in this document](#). Case managers have a dual role: on one hand, they act on behalf of the employer to minimize the costs caused by an illness or accident; on the other hand, they act on behalf of the person concerned to facilitate their reintegration into the work process. This is precisely why transparency and open communication are crucial.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of case management agencies:

- ✧ List of support organizations for young people, available for all cantons: <https://cm.berufsbildung.ch/dyn/5920.aspx>
- ✧ XpertCenter (available in DE, FR, IT): <https://www.xpertcenter.ch/>



- ✦ Sulser&Partner AG (Locations: Zürich, Basel, Bern, Chur, Frauenfeld, Freiburg, Genf, Luzern, St. Gallen): <https://www.sulserpartner.ch/>
- ✦ Other case management services are available via health and pension plans.





## Links

### *Links mentioned in the Vademecum*

Long COVID - what is it exactly?

[www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/what-is-long-covid/](http://www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/what-is-long-covid/)

Social Impact of Long COVID

<https://www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/society/>

Vademecum Post Exertional Malaise (PEM), recognize and prevent "crashes"

[www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/vademecum/fatigue/#pem-postexertional-malaise](http://www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/vademecum/fatigue/#pem-postexertional-malaise)

Vademecum Pacing

<https://www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/vademecum/fatigue/#pacing>

Long Covid Schweiz. "Versicherung" (Insurance)

<https://long-covid-info.ch/fr/ressources-utiles/>

AVS/AI. "Demande de prestations AI pour adultes : Mesures professionnelles/Rente" (page available in DE, FR, IT)

[https://form.zas.admin.ch/orbeon/fr/IV/001\\_001\\_v01-2021/new](https://form.zas.admin.ch/orbeon/fr/IV/001_001_v01-2021/new)

Vademecum Management of the invalidity insurance (IV/AI)

<https://www.altea-network.com/en/long-covid/vademecum/law/#law-iv-ai>

Blog Invalidity Insurance (AI/IV) numbers now publicly available

<https://www.altea-network.com/en/blog/66-ai-iv-numbers-public/>

Netzwerk Case Management Schweiz. «Definition und Standards Case Management» [Definition and standards Case Management]. (in German)

<https://www.netzwerk->

[cm.ch/sites/default/files/uploads/2022\\_definitionen\\_und\\_standards\\_version\\_final\\_ag\\_1.pdf](http://cm.ch/sites/default/files/uploads/2022_definitionen_und_standards_version_final_ag_1.pdf)



## Additional links

Berner Reha Zentrum. "Post Exertional Malaise" (in German)

<https://www.rehabern.ch/>

Centre of expertise for occupational integration, Rehaklinik Bellikon

<https://www.rehabellikon.ch/centre-of-expertise-for-occupational-integration/>

Long Covid Schweiz. (in German and French)

<https://www.long-covid-info.ch>

Netzwerk Case Management Schweiz. (in German)

<https://www.netzwerk-cm.ch/>

Verband Covid Langzeitfolgen. «COVID-19 und IV» [COVID-19 and AI/IV]. (in German)

<https://www.covid-langzeitfolgen.ch/index.php/iv>

## References

Federal Office of Public Health FOPH. (2022). Coronavirus : Post COVID-19 condition

<https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/de/home/krankheiten/ausbrueche-epidemien-pandemien/aktuelle-ausbrueche-epidemien/novel-cov/krankheit-symptome-behandlung-ursprung/long-covid.html>

Netzwerk-CM Schweiz. (2022). Fachwissen. Netzwerk Case Management Schweiz.

<https://www.netzwerk-cm.ch/>

Rehaklinik Bellikon. (2022). Centre of expertise for occupational Reintegration.

<https://www.rehabellikon.ch/kompetenzzentrum-%20berufliche-eingliederung/>



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Long Covid Schweiz



[info@long-covid-info.ch](mailto:info@long-covid-info.ch)

[long-covid-info.ch](http://long-covid-info.ch)

Sulser & Partner

[info@sulserpartner.ch](mailto:info@sulserpartner.ch)

[www.sulserpartner.ch](http://www.sulserpartner.ch)

Altea Long COVID Network



[hello@altea-network.com](mailto:hello@altea-network.com)

[www.altea-network.com](http://www.altea-network.com)

