

VARMA

Job accommodation supports continuing at work when work ability deteriorates

Job accommodation is an effective way to prevent sickness absences and permanent disability. Providing job accommodation early enough and to a sufficient extent can support continued work participation and speed up return to work after sickness absence. Job accommodation benefits the employee, employer and society as a whole.

What is job accommodation?

The aim of job accommodation is to adapt the work and work tasks to the employee's work ability in such a way that it is possible to continue working despite health-related or other restrictions. Job accommodation means, for example, temporary or permanent adjustment of the content of work tasks, workload, working hours or working conditions. Job accommodation requires joint planning, implementation and evaluation at the workplace.



Solutions for supervisors

Identify work ability challenges in good time and address them with the employee as early as possible. Discuss the possibilities for job accommodation.

Accommodate the job and its duties so that the work corresponds to the employee's work ability and resources. Together, consider ways to make the work easier, for example by reducing heavy work phases or tasks or by customising the job description.

Offer flexible working hours, such as opportunities for reduced working hours, part-time work, reducing night work in shift work and, where possible, transfer to day work.

Make changes to the working environment. Facilitate work aids that support the smooth performance of work. For example, use lifting and moving equipment, lighter tools, adjustable electric desks or standing mats.

Actively support the return to work during and after sickness absence.

Cooperate with occupational health care and utilise expert support in job accommodation. For example, discuss the accommodation options together in occupational health negotiations.

Job accommodation can be used as part of vocational rehabilitation.

43%
of those with musculoskeletal diseases have had their job accommodation options examined

21%
of those diagnosed with mental health condition had utilized part-time work

41%
of those with musculoskeletal diseases have had an occupational health negotiation

Source: Varma's application data, 2021–2024.

What do we know?

Often, the employee can continue working when the job accommodation is provided early enough to match their work ability. There is strong evidence that job accommodation shortens the duration of disability, especially in musculoskeletal disorders. Job accommodation should also be considered in the event of mental health challenges.

Our research showed that job accommodation is used more often for employees whose work ability challenges are related to musculoskeletal disorders. On the other hand, part-time work was more common when the cause of the disability was related to mental health. Many methods of job accommodation are also used to reduce the workload of older employees.

Why is this important?

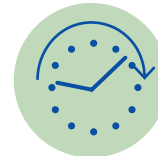
Job accommodation helps the employee to continue working smoothly. Job accommodation is a way to reduce the costs caused by sickness absences and disability. Legislation also requires employers to ensure healthy and safe working conditions and to make reasonable adjustments to the work, if necessary.

Key methods of job accommodation



Changes in duties and work content

- lightening or limiting work tasks
- reducing the workload
- restructuring of work and job rotation



Working time solutions

- shortening of working hours, for example part-time work
- avoiding night work
- remote work, hybrid work
- pauses in work



Work environment and ergonomics

- improving ergonomics
- changes in the workstation and working environment
- use of assistive equipment to support work



Social support

- e.g. strengthening the support from the supervisor and the work community



What should be done?

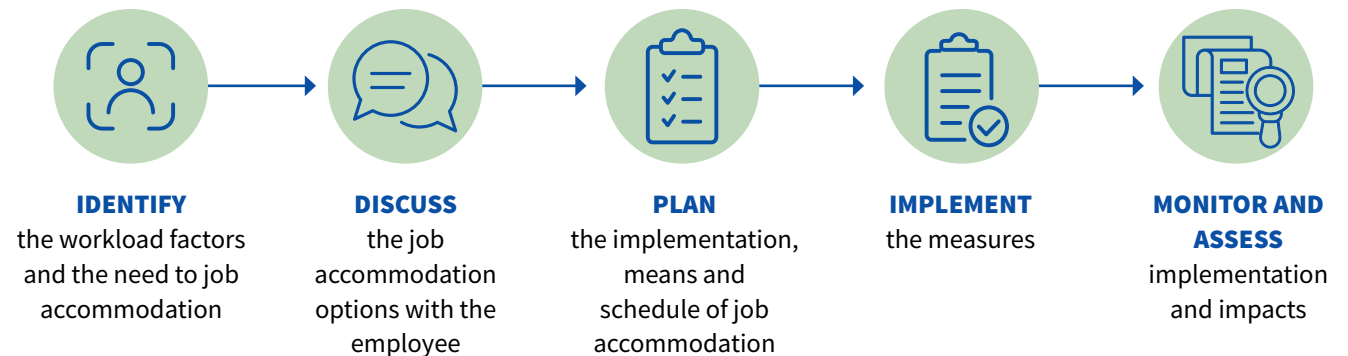
At the workplace, it is important to identify the deterioration of work ability in good time and to take active action before the challenges are prolonged. It is advisable to investigate the possibilities for job accommodation as early as possible. Job accommodation should be part of the workplace's early support model. The employer may receive subsidy for arranging working conditions from the employment authorities, for example, for new tools or alterations to the workplace.

Supervisors need information on the methods for job accommodation, sufficient support and means for implementing the modifications. Often, the most efficient way to support work ability is to combine different measures.

The supervisor's role in supporting the employee is key. It is important to agree with the employee on the job accommodation measures, their duration and follow-up. At the same time, employees should also be encouraged to craft their job on their own initiative. Success is also supported by good cooperation with HR and occupational health care.

Job accommodation may not be an effective solution if the work ability is not sufficient even for the accommodated tasks, there are no realistic prospects for the recovery of work ability or the accommodation exceeds the arrangements reasonably required of the employer. In this case, it is often more reasonable to map out work that is better suited to the state of health elsewhere.

Key stages of job accommodation



What does job accommodation require in different roles?

Management

- Create a work culture that makes it possible to accommodate job in the event of work ability challenges.
- Ensure consistent practices and resources for job accommodation.
- Monitor the effects of job accommodation on work ability.

Personnel administration

- Develop practices that support job accommodation.
- Instruct supervisors in job accommodation and its different options.
- Support supervisors in job accommodation.
- Cooperate with occupational health care and, if necessary, the earnings-related pension insurer.

Supervisor

- Identify work ability challenges in good time and reduce excessive workload.
- Together with the employee, investigate the possibilities for job accommodation.
- Plan and implement practical arrangements for job accommodation.
- Make sure that the work community is aware of the job accommodation and contributes to its success.
- Support the employee's return to work and continuing at work.
- Monitors and assesses the implementation and impacts of work modification.

It is important for the employee to identify their own resources and work ability limitations and discuss them with their supervisor.



Occupational health care should be used in assessing the workload and planning and assessing job accommodation.

Methods for job accommodation in musculoskeletal disorders

Job accommodation can reduce the physical load of work and prevent the worsening of pain, functional limitations and symptoms. Reducing physical workload in good time supports continued work and the recovery of work ability.

Tasks and content of work



- reducing or eliminating heavy lifting, transfers and manual work
- reducing repetitive work and static working postures
- reducing work tasks that require movement, standing or strain on the feet
- job rotation and work in pairs

Work environment and ergonomics



- improving work ergonomics (workstations, working positions, working movements)
- use of assistive devices and ergonomic tools (lifting, transfer and support equipment)
- accessibility of the working environment

Working hour arrangements



- shorter working hours
- adding breaks to work
- opportunities to influence work and working hours

Consider also the following!

- competence development
- re-training
- partial sickness allowance
- work trials



Methods of job accommodation in mental health challenges

With mental health challenges, the focus of job accommodation is on good work management, reducing psychosocial and cognitive workload and providing adequate support for work. Work can also support work ability in the event of mental health challenges.

Tasks and content of work



- limiting and clarifying tasks and responsibilities
- prioritising work
- breaking down work objectives

Reducing cognitive workload



- lightening the workload, information overload and schedule pressures
- reducing interruptions and disruptions
- supporting a calm working environment: peaceful workspace, remote work

Working hour arrangements



- shortening working hours (e.g. part-time work)
- sufficient breaks in work
- predictable and regular work rhythm
- avoidance of night work and irregular shift work
- opportunities to influence work and working hours

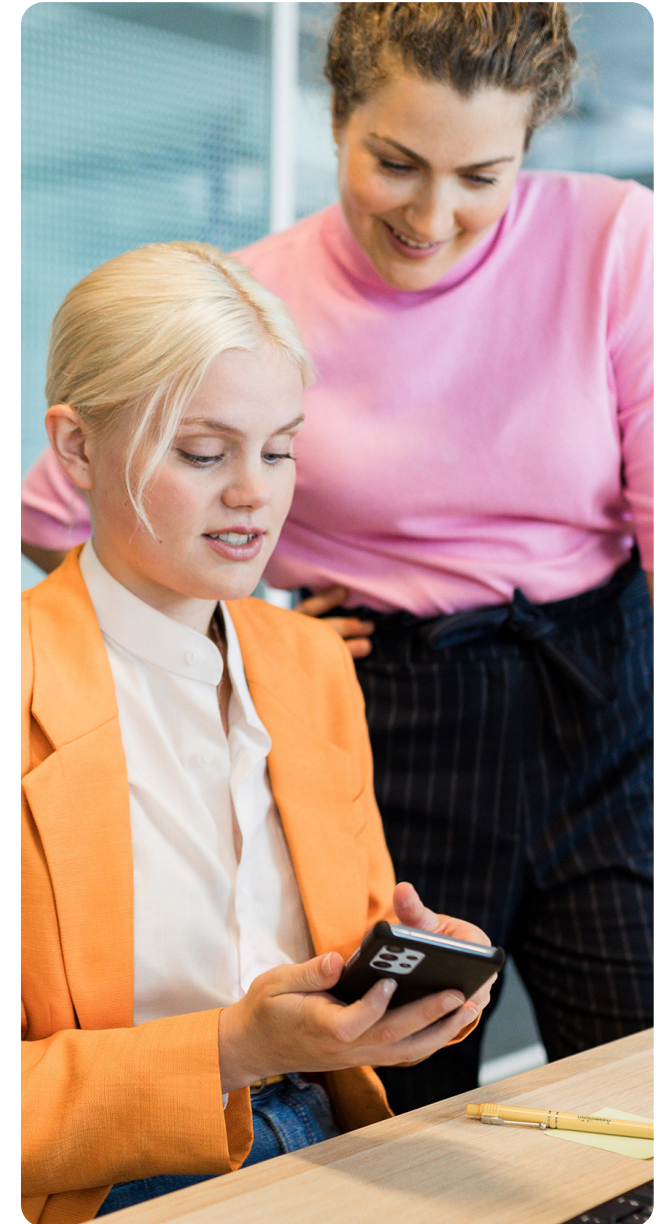
Social relations and interaction



- support for work from supervisor and colleagues
- reducing social job demands, such as customer interaction
- working in smaller teams or more independently

Consider also the following!

- competence development
- re-training
- partial sickness allowance
- work trials





How the fact sheet was prepared

The fact sheet is based on Varma's data, reports and studies that have investigated the significance of job accommodation in promoting work ability. The information sources used include Varma's report on workplace measures and the success of vocational rehabilitation ([Savinainen & Airila, 2025](#), in Finnish), the FIOH's *Mind and job accommodation* learning material and the Muokkaa työtä section (Nevala et al. 2022, in Finnish) of the *Työhön kytkeytyvä kuntoutus* information package as well as the *Työkyvyn tuen vaikuttavuus* publication (Ervasti et al. 2022, with an English summary *Effectiveness of interventions to support work ability and prevent work disability*).

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<https://www.varma.fi/en/work-ability/work-ability-services/research-activities/>