How to Support Occupational Health Assessments

Physical Examples

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Occupational health is a type of medical service for:

- supporting employees and employers
- helping wellbeing in the workplace
- It can be used for both physical and mental health.

What happens in an occupational health assessment: The occupational health adviser might ask the employee about:

- their health problem
- any treatment they're having
- any concerns they have about returning to work

The occupational health adviser may need to get more information from the employee's treating health professionals. In this case, the employee should be told the reason and asked to sign a consent form.

The employee has the right to see the doctor's report before it is sent to the occupational health adviser.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

An occupational health assessment is a useful addition to a treating health professional's report because it's more focused on:

- how the employee does their job
- how the job might affect the employee's health

The employer should consider the **recommendations** of both the occupational health and health professional's reports.

If there is any conflicting advice, they should talk with their employee and **come to an agreement** on the best course of action.

Depending on the health issue, the employee's progress might need to be assessed again before a firm agreement can be made about their return to work or to full duties.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH: REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

What does reasonable mean?

- What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances of each individual case.
- Is the adjustment practical to make?
- Does the employer have the resources to pay for it?
- Will the adjustment be effective in overcoming or reducing the disadvantage in the workplace?
- Will the adjustment have an adverse impact on the health & safety of others?
- The size of an employer can be a factor. An employment tribunal may expect more from a large organisation than a small one because it may have greater means.
- If the employer has access to other funding e.g. Government's Access to Work scheme - employer is responsible for paying the cost. (www.gov.uk/access-to-work)

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH: REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

Deciding what reasonable adjustments need to be made

In assessing what reasonable adjustments need to be made, the three main questions an employer should consider are:

1. Does the employer need to change how things are done - for example, any work practices or policies?
2. Does the employer need to physically change the workplace?
3. Does the employer need to provide extra equipment or get someone to assist the disabled worker or job applicant in some way?

Disability discrimination: obligations for employers

- Keeping in mind that many adjustments are simple and inexpensive to make and will benefit employees and employers.
- Make sure employees are not discriminated against because they are disabled, because they are associated with someone who is disabled or because they are thought to be disabled.
- Make sure that policies and practices in the workplace don't put disabled employees at a disadvantage.
- www.acas.org.uk/disability

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH: HELPFUL INFORMATION

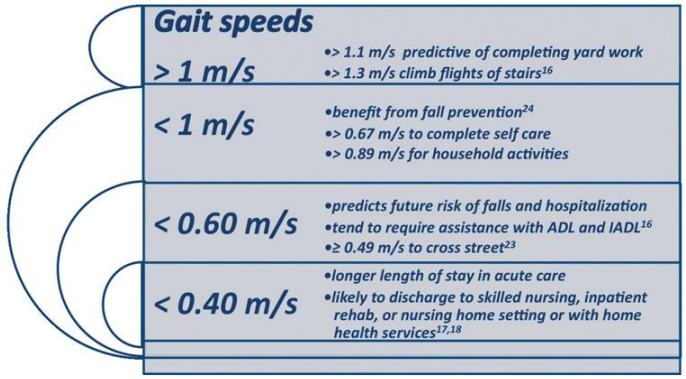
- Use normative data where this is available
- Relate to functional level of the individual and if, in your opinion, the individual has reached their potential or not
- Given an opinion on the potential they would be expected to achieve within a reasonable timeframe and additional 'adjustments' that may help
- Give an opinion on how this will affect the individual contextual situation. This may include an example of a task analysis

EXAMPLE: GAIT SPEED

- **Report scores of individual.** Example, observed leisure walking speed averaged at 1.87m/s over a distance of 15m over outdoor terrain such walking along a paved path.
- **Report normative data.** Example, physically this indicates a good level of community ambulation ability such as crossing a road.
- **Report context.** Example, can maintain this speed generally in community walking for up to 1 hour, negotiating pedestrian traffic easily.

Table 1. Normal gait speeds for healthy community-dwelling men and women.[11]

Age (years)	Gender	Average Gait Speed (m/s)
20-29	Men	1.36
	Women	1.34
30-39	Men	1.43
	Women	1.34
40-49	Men	1.43
	Women	1.39
50-59	Men	1.43
	Women	1.31
60-69	Men	1.34
	Women	1.24
70-79	Men	1.26
	Women	1.13
80-89	Men	0.97
	Women	0.94



EXAMPLE: BALANCE

- **Report scores of individual.** Example, SLS time = 60s on the right leg and 51s on the left leg. TS =25s.
- **Report normative data.** Example, SLS score showed high functional level for someone her age (age 18-39, mean 43.5-45.1s). TS of 10s or less is generally considered a fall risk indicator.
- **Report context.** No risk of falls or limitations in balance when completing tasks associated with her job e.g. climbing stairs, making a bed etc

EXAMPLE: GRIP STRENGTH

- **Report scores of the individual.** Example, mean score for left hand = 16.6kgs and the mean score for right hand = 2kgs, showing weakness in his right grip strength compared to the left.
- **Report normative data.** Example, normal grip strength in male of 55-59 years of age has a range of 30.7kg-48.5kg, with values of less than 30.7kg considered weak.
- **Report context.** Example, 9kg of grip strength is required to perform self-care tasks such as dressing and holding small items such as a fork or a toothbrush.

KILOS (KGs)			
AGE	Weak	Normal	Strong
10-11	< 12.6	12.6-22.4	> 22.4
12-13	< 19.4	19.4-31.2	> 31.2
14-15	< 28.5	28.5-44.3	> 44.3
16-17	< 32.6	32.6-52.4	> 52.4
18-19	< 35.7	35.7-55.5	> 55.5
20-24	< 36.8	36.8-56.6	> 56.6
25-29	< 37.7	37.7-57.5	> 57.5
30-34	< 36.0	36.0-55.8	> 55.8
35-39	< 35.8	35.8-55.6	> 55.6
40-44	< 35.5	35.5-55.3	> 55.3
45-49	< 34.7	34.7-54.5	> 54.5
50-54	< 32.9	32.9-50.7	> 50.7
55-59	< 30.7	30.7-48.5	> 48.5
60-64	< 30.2	30.2-48.0	> 48.0
65-69	< 28.2	28.2-44.0	> 44.0
70-99	< 21.3	21.3-35.1	> 35.1

EXAMPLE: DEXTERITY

- **Report scores of the individual.** Example, finger dexterity different between left and right, with mean on the left of 26.83 seconds and mean on the right of 21.91 seconds. Slight ataxic movements of both limbs were observed during the task. Individual is right-hand dominant.
- **Report normative data.** Example, normal dexterity score range would be 14.76-18.06 seconds for the right and 15.77-19.23 seconds for the left.
- **Report context.** Will require more time to complete tasks associated with the role.

MALE	AGE	N	MEAN RIGHT HAND	MEAN LEFT HAND
	51 to 55 years old	25	18.93	19.84
	56 to 60 years old	25	20.90	21.64
	61 to 65 years old	24	20.87	21.60
	66 to 70 years old	14	21.23	22.29
	71 years old or older	25	25.79	25.95
FEMALE	AGE	N	MEAN RIGHT HAND	MEAN LEFT HAND
	51 to 55 years old	42	17.38	18.92
	56 to 60 years old	31	17.86	19.48
	61 to 65 years old	29	18.99	20.33
	66 to 70 years old	31	19.90	21.44
	71 years old or older	31	22.49	24.11