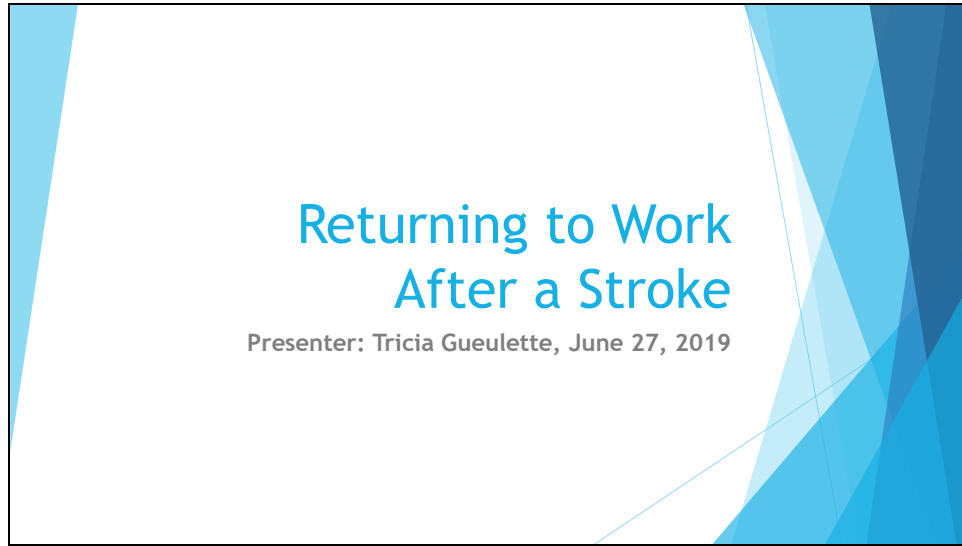


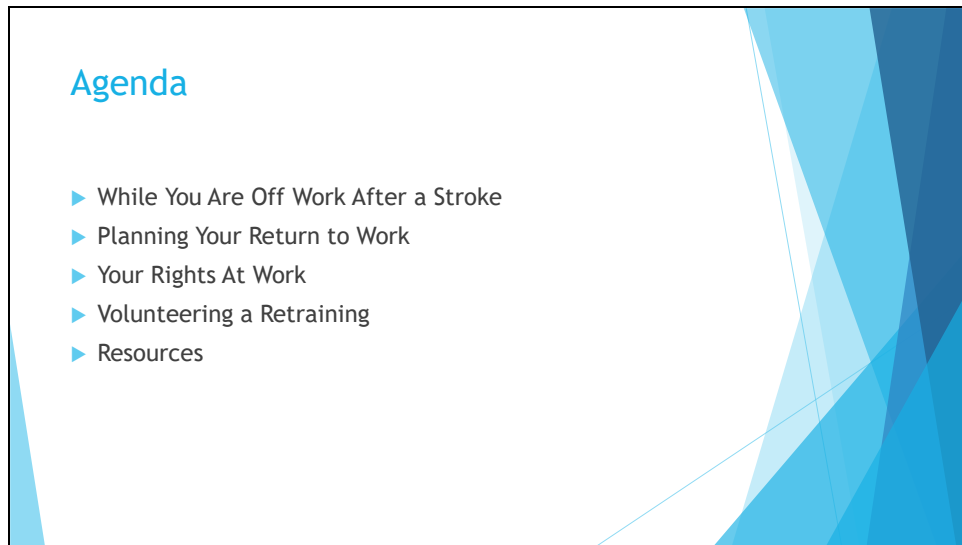
Slide 1



Returning to Work
After a Stroke

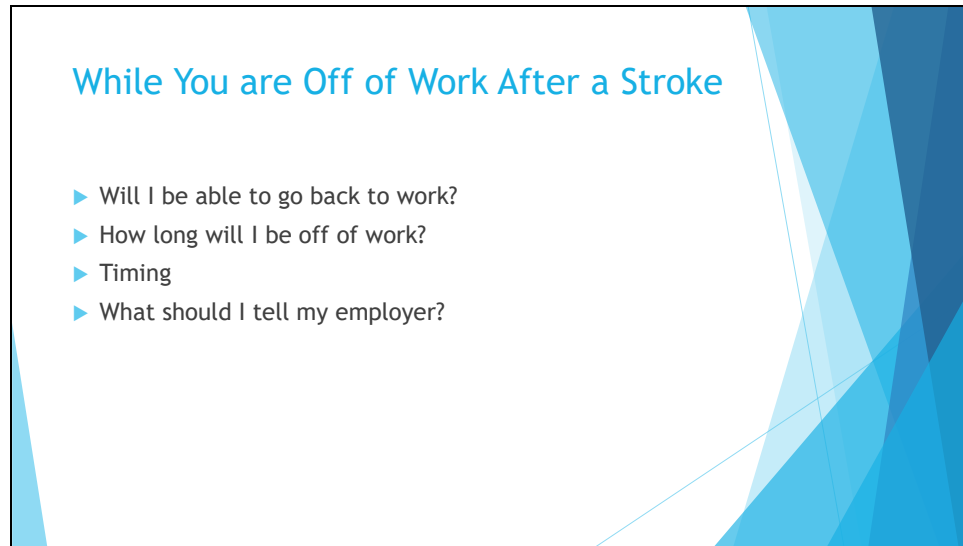
Presenter: Tricia Gueulette, June 27, 2019

Slide 2



Agenda

- ▶ While You Are Off Work After a Stroke
- ▶ Planning Your Return to Work
- ▶ Your Rights At Work
- ▶ Volunteering a Retraining
- ▶ Resources



Will I be able to go back to work?

With the right care, support and advice many people do return to work. Whether you are able to return to work and how long it takes will depend on the effects of your stroke, the type of care and support you received, what work you were doing before and the amount of support your employer can give you.

How long will I be off work?

Every stroke is different, and every recovery is different. Someone who had a mild stroke could return to work within a week or two, while others may return after months or a couple of years. There's no set pattern, and no comparison against which you should measure your recovery. Talk to your doctors, nurses, and therapists about what you can expect. The most important thing is to take things as they come and keep doing your rehabilitation.

Strokes affect people in many different ways and symptoms may change over time. You should return to your GP right away if you experience new symptoms.

Timing

It's important not to rush back to work too quickly following a stroke. For many, financial or other pressures mean they want to go back full time as soon as possible. However, it's important to do so only when you feel well enough, have received support and have a plan in place with your employer for your return. You might get advice from professionals, your employer and your family who might all have differing opinions about your return to work after stroke. Remember, you are the expert in your own needs so try to retain control over decisions about returning to work. Many people find that work helps

with their recovery. It can give a sense of purpose and focus to your day, provided you can cope with the demands of the job.

What should I tell my employer?

If possible contact your employer yourself. Tell them that you have had a stroke, that you are improving with rehabilitation, and that you will contact them again. Ideally, you should specify when you will next be in touch to discuss your return. If you need advice, your GP or occupational therapist can help you come up with a time frame.

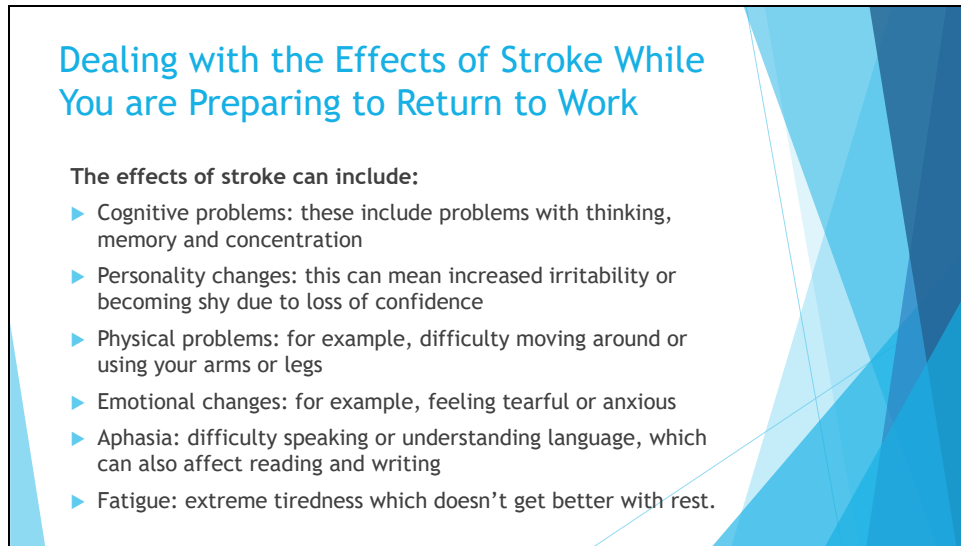
When you speak with your employer, ask for a copy of their policy for returning to work after sick leave. It is also useful to ask for a copy of the job description for your current role, or any alternative roles that you are considering. Make sure you keep in touch with your employer. This should help you feel

less isolated and ease your worries about returning to work. Talk through your thoughts, concerns and options with someone you trust and who will support you in making your decision to return. Many employers will be supportive of your return to work. Unfortunately, some may lack the knowledge or experience for supporting people back to work after a stroke and may be unsympathetic.

Each time you speak to your employer, only give them the facts they need. Helpful information to give your employer could be:

- the date of your stroke
- your likely date of discharge from hospital
- a date that you'll be back in touch with them to discuss how you are recovering.

Try not to be speculative, emotional, or give the impression that your condition is worse than it is. It may be helpful to talk through what you intend to say to your employer with a friend, family member, or healthcare professional first.



Dealing with the Effects of Stroke While You are Preparing to Return to Work

The effects of stroke can include:

- ▶ Cognitive problems: these include problems with thinking, memory and concentration
- ▶ Personality changes: this can mean increased irritability or becoming shy due to loss of confidence
- ▶ Physical problems: for example, difficulty moving around or using your arms or legs
- ▶ Emotional changes: for example, feeling tearful or anxious
- ▶ Aphasia: difficulty speaking or understanding language, which can also affect reading and writing
- ▶ Fatigue: extreme tiredness which doesn't get better with rest.

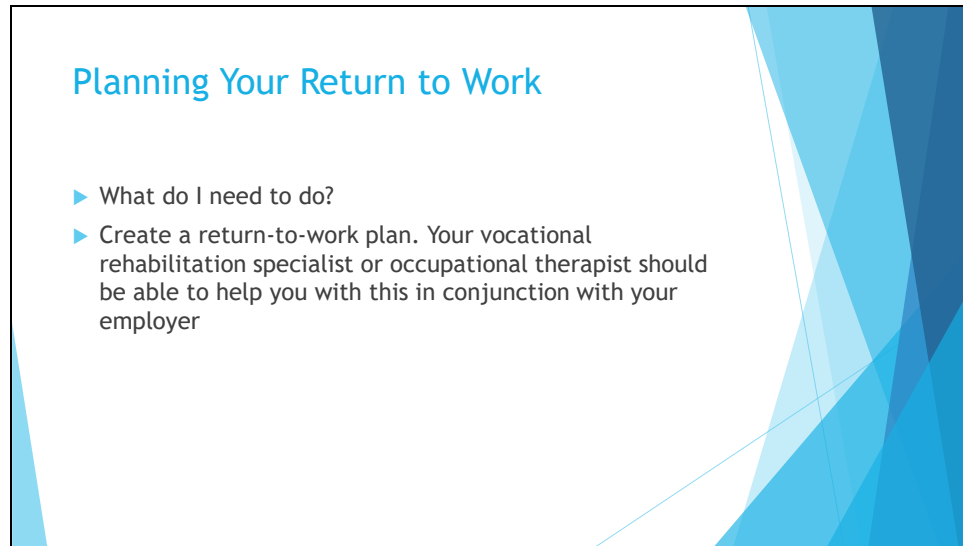
Changes to personality may be particularly difficult for colleagues to adjust to. Try to acknowledge these changes as they come up and explain it's an effect of the stroke and that this may get better over time. A number of the effects of stroke can't be seen (such as anxiety or cognitive problems). We call these 'hidden' disabilities but they can make a big difference to the way a person deals with everyday experiences. Very often people aren't aware of these effects until they are back at work.

Emotional and Personality Changes

Tips for managing emotional changes at work

- ▶ Frequent reviews will help both you and your employer. This will allow you to identify issues early on and put in place any changes that are needed.
- ▶ Ask if your organization can offer any counselling or emotional support through an Employee Assistance Program
- ▶ Ask your GP about emotional support and counselling or find out about services you can refer yourself to

A stroke is sudden and shocking, and affects every part of your life. It's a lot to deal with, and everyone deals with it differently. Sometimes, when things seem difficult, anxiety and frustration can make people feel that they're unable to cope or can stop people from returning to work. It is important that you think about whether your expectations, skills and stamina match up to the work you want to do.



Look at going back to work as part of your recovery, rather than the end of your recovery. When you feel you may be ready to return, your employer should work with you to identify what your needs are and what adjustments they can make to help you. Think about a phased return: a gradual return to work starting off part time and building up to full time hours, to ease back into work gently.

If you have an occupational therapist, they can talk about the work you were doing before your stroke and help you to set realistic goals about returning.

They can advise on aids or equipment that you may need. You may be able to get access to a specialist vocational rehabilitation team if there is one in your area.

Speak to your occupational therapist or GP to find out more.

Create a return-to-work plan

Returning to work doesn't necessarily mean returning to the same job with the same roles and responsibilities. Even if you can no longer do exactly the same role you did before, there may still be other options to explore. A return-to-work plan is a plan of action that details someone's support needs following a stroke. Planning for your return and looking at how you will manage the effects of the stroke means you are more likely to stay in work once you return.

What's in a Return-to-Work Plan?

- ▶ No need to go into lots of medical detail - just a summary of the effects of the stroke
- ▶ Look at each effect in turn and think about practical steps you can take to address each one
- ▶ Try using these headings for your plan:
 - Your Tasks
 - Hours of Work
 - Review
 - Communicating to the Staff
 - Breaks
 - Time off for Appointments

The focus should be on what you can do rather than what you can't. Take a look at your job description with your line manager or human resources officer. Talk about the tasks you can do to start with, and what you feel you could work up to later. Try to think about practical solutions to things that might be difficult for you, such as using equipment or lifting objects. Share your ideas with your employer and try to work together to come up with solutions.

Hours of work

You could look at the option of phasing your return. This means starting part time and gradually increasing the number of hours and days you work.

Think about what may work best for you, such as starting later if you need longer to get up and out of the house.

You may need longer breaks to help you manage any fatigue.

Review

This is important as it helps you see how you are managing your tasks and also lets your employer feedback about how they feel things are going. Think about how this will take place, and agree the time frame and expectations. It could be informal, such as 20 minutes every week with your line manager, with brief notes taken.

Communicating the stroke to the staff team

You can help decide how to share information about your stroke with other members of staff. You may choose not to tell them you have had a stroke, just that you will return part time and

that your tasks have changed. Another option is an email could be sent to your team from your line manager, with text that has been agreed by you.

Breaks

Many people will need to have more frequent breaks to help beat fatigue, such as five minutes after every hour worked.

Time off for appointments

If you need time off for hospital appointments or therapy, bring this up early on and get it agreed with your employer.

Take a flexible approach

Some effects of your stroke get better but new ones could come up. By factoring in time to review how things are going you can flag up if some tasks are unmanageable or when you feel well enough to take on more or different tasks. This doesn't have to be formal, it can be over a cup of coffee for half an hour on a Friday with your manager to see how the week has gone. It can be a good idea to keep brief notes and summarize any actions- you or your manager can do this but make sure you agree them.

Changes at work

There may have been changes within your organization while you were away on sick leave. If possible, find out about any changes and their likely effects on you or your position before you go back to work, and talk to your manager if you are concerned.

Keep a Diary

This can be very simple, just a log of any key dates such as when you took on more or different tasks and how they went. This can help you to see how you are progressing and re-build your confidence.

Talking to colleagues about your stroke

You may be understandably nervous about how colleagues will react to you and the fact you had a stroke. Remember it's your choice whether you discuss your stroke with colleagues. Sometimes being open and answering questions can help people to understand and be more supportive. Don't be embarrassed or apologize for the effects of your stroke. It can help your colleagues if you explain what a stroke is and how it has affected you, particularly if the effects are 'invisible'.

Talk to other stroke survivors about going back to work

Hearing how others overcame barriers to return to work and sharing your experiences with others of a similar age can help you deal with feelings of isolation. It can also give you ideas on what to do if you experience similar problems.

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Your Rights at Work

Under Canadian human rights law, employers have an obligation to adjust workplace rules, policies and practices that have a negative impact on employees or job applicants with disabilities. In other words, employers have a duty to accommodate disability in the workplace. An employer's failure to accommodate an employee or job applicant's disability may result in a claim of discrimination under B.C.'s *Human Rights Code*.

- ▶ **British Columbia** employers have a **duty to accommodate disabled** employees to the point of undue hardship. This **duty** requires an employer to do everything that is "reasonable," even if it is a "hardship."

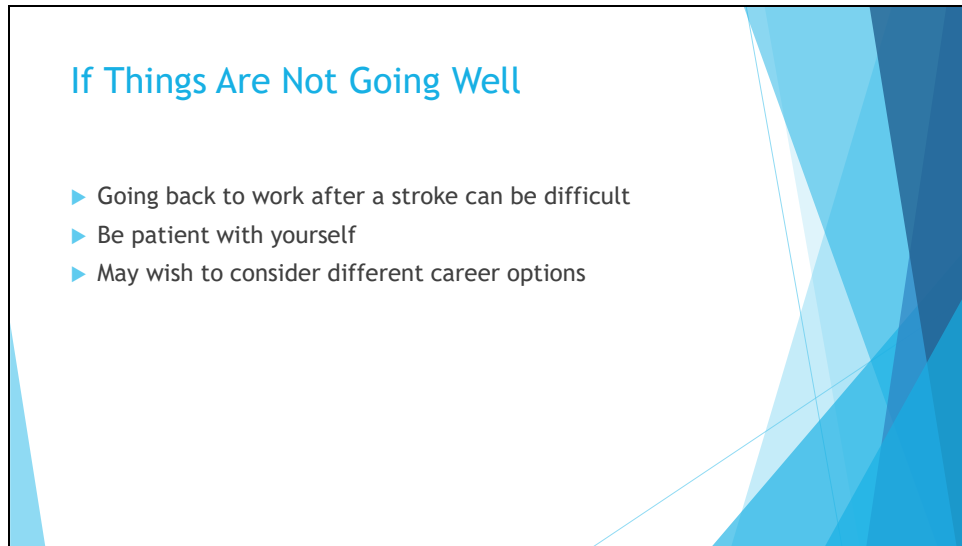
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Reasonable Accommodations might include:

- ▶ Getting more time to complete tasks
- ▶ Getting help from a support worker
- ▶ Starting work later to avoid rush hour
- ▶ Finishing work earlier to avoid rush hour
- ▶ Changing tasks to suit what a person can do
- ▶ Changing targets or getting support from other colleagues to meet targets.
- ▶ Speaking to the staff team on a stroke survivor's behalf to let them know about the stroke
- ▶ Working four out of five days per week
- ▶ Getting support with travel to and from work
- ▶ Being allowed to take time off to attend hospital appointments
- ▶ Regular meetings with your manager to see how the tasks set are going
- ▶ Working in a quieter office

Be clear about your support needs

The duty to make reasonable adjustments only applies when someone has a disability as defined in the Equality Act. It does not apply if the employer could not reasonably be expected to know that a person is disabled. It is therefore very important to be honest about the effects of your stroke and keep in contact with your employer. The way your stroke affects your work should be documented in your return-to-work plan and reviewed regularly

The slide features a white background with a blue geometric pattern on the right side. The title 'If Things Are Not Going Well' is in blue. Below it is a bulleted list with three items, each preceded by a blue triangle.

If Things Are Not Going Well

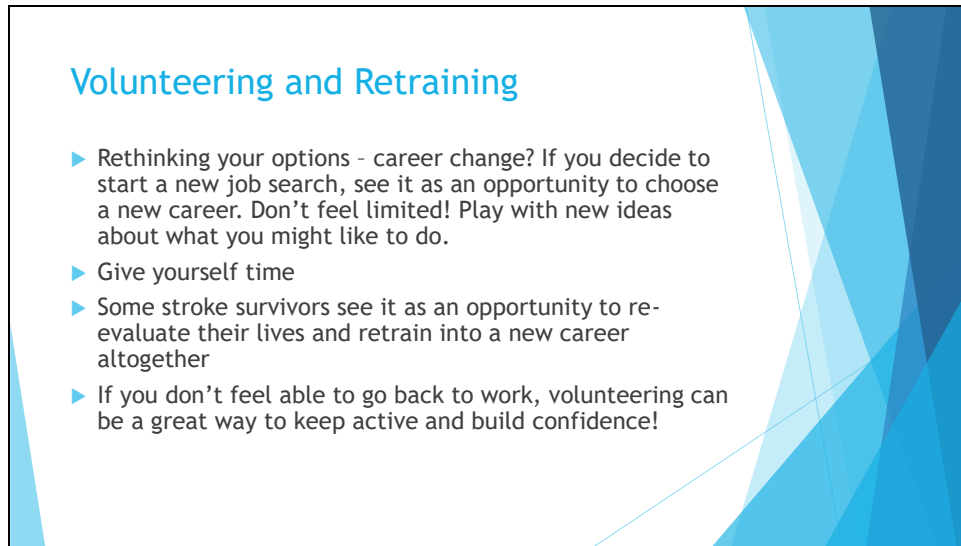
- ▶ Going back to work after a stroke can be difficult
- ▶ Be patient with yourself
- ▶ May wish to consider different career options

If things are not going well

For many stroke survivors, being back in work after a long time off sick can be difficult, no matter how well-prepared they feel before they go back. They report that tasks that were easy before the stroke become more difficult afterwards, and that regaining skills, confidence and stamina can take a long time.

Don't give yourself a hard time if you feel unable to continue in the job or occupation you were doing before your stroke. You could stay in the same company but in a different role. Now might be a good time to look at your options and consider a career change.

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Volunteering and Retraining

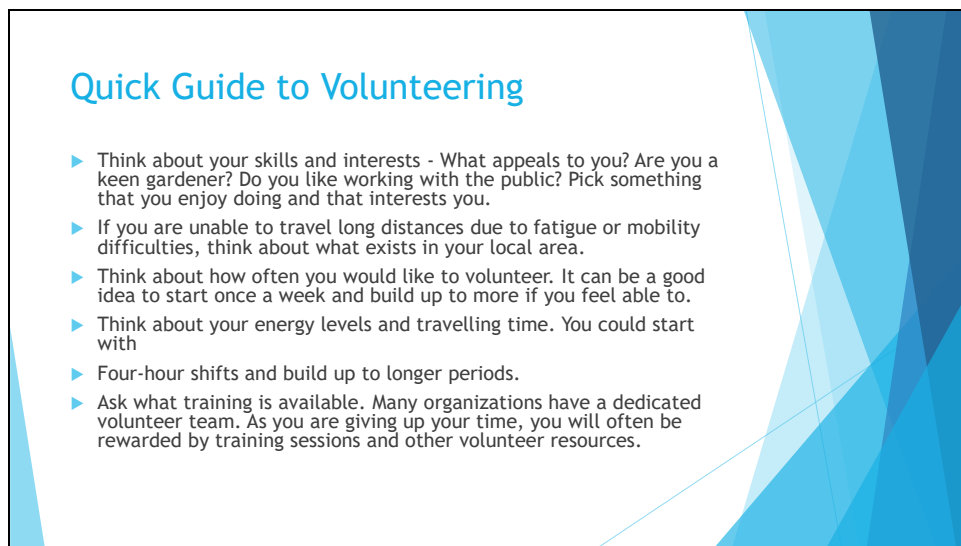
- ▶ Rethinking your options - career change? If you decide to start a new job search, see it as an opportunity to choose a new career. Don't feel limited! Play with new ideas about what you might like to do.
- ▶ Give yourself time
- ▶ Some stroke survivors see it as an opportunity to re-evaluate their lives and retrain into a new career altogether
- ▶ If you don't feel able to go back to work, volunteering can be a great way to keep active and build confidence!

There are plenty of options available for people who feel they cannot go back to the work they were doing before the stroke. You might decide to look for a new job. You could try volunteering, or re-train for a new career.

How volunteering can help you:

- lets you explore new hobbies and interests
- helps build new skills or develop skills you haven't used in a while
- allows you to meet new people, to help deal with feelings of depression and isolation many people face after a stroke.

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Quick Guide to Volunteering

- ▶ Think about your skills and interests - What appeals to you? Are you a keen gardener? Do you like working with the public? Pick something that you enjoy doing and that interests you.
- ▶ If you are unable to travel long distances due to fatigue or mobility difficulties, think about what exists in your local area.
- ▶ Think about how often you would like to volunteer. It can be a good idea to start once a week and build up to more if you feel able to.
- ▶ Think about your energy levels and travelling time. You could start with
- ▶ Four-hour shifts and build up to longer periods.
- ▶ Ask what training is available. Many organizations have a dedicated volunteer team. As you are giving up your time, you will often be rewarded by training sessions and other volunteer resources.

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Vocational Rehabilitation

- ▶ **Assessment:** goal is to assess functional and cognitive capacity, to look at your transferrable skills based on your your work and life experiences, look at your existing skill set, your ability to learn new skills and to look at your interests and aptitudes.
- ▶ **Planning:** after the assessment phase, your vocational rehabilitation specialist will help you to create a plan (much like we already discussed). Will you be returning to your old job? Will you look for a new career? That will all be discussed. Together you will create a personalized plan that identifies all the steps to find and secure work in your chosen field. This plan can include:
 - Support for educational upgrading or post-secondary training
 - Help in preparing for and finding a job, such as improving interview and job search skills
 - Job search help

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Vocational Rehabilitation (con't)

- ▶ **Implementing the Plan:** Once you have a plan in place, your vocational rehabilitation specialist should help you to implement that plan and check in with you regularly.

Support and Resources for Employment

- ▶ Vocational Rehabilitation Department GF Strong
- ▶ Work BC Centres (WorkBC.ca) can help with:
 - Discovering job options
 - Pursuing post-secondary education
 - Get funding or assistive adaptations for your education
 - Gain the work experience, job skills and technologies you need to do the job you are interested in pursuing
 - Job Search and Job Placement
 - Create or expand your own business

Vocational rehab services located at G.F. Strong Rehab Centre offer vocational counselling support and assessment to improve clients' employment potential by developing a return to work plan, determining work accommodations, and exploring suitable job options. Medical diagnoses include: spinal cord injury, acquired brain injury including stroke and traumatic brain injury, arthritis and other rheumatic diseases, amputation, neuromuscular skeletal conditions. Referrals must be made by a physician or allied health professional.

http://www.swostroke.ca/rtw-self-assessment-introduction/' and 'Heart and Stroke Foundation Return to Work Readiness checklist: <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/stroke/recovery-and-support/back-to-work>'."/>

Other Resources

- ▶ Stroke Network of Southwestern Ontario has an online self assessment for thinking about returning to work after a stroke: <http://www.swostroke.ca/rtw-self-assessment-introduction/>
- ▶ Heart and Stroke Foundation Return to Work Readiness checklist: <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/stroke/recovery-and-support/back-to-work>