

## Workplace Processes Relevant for Employees with Arthritis, Joint Pain, and Back Pain

### This printable summary includes:

- Workplace Processes: The Basics
- Relevant Processes
- Impact of Workplace Processes
- Act Now: Where to Start?

## Workplace Processes Relevant for Employees with Arthritis, Joint Pain, and Back Pain: The Basics

### What are workplace processes?

Workplace processes are the steps followed for human resources (HR) practices such as hiring a new employee, reporting workplace incidents, or conducting performance reviews.

Some health-related processes relevant for employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain include what to do if an employee discloses arthritis or requests a workplace accommodation.

### Importance of workplace processes

**For employees:** Written and clearly communicated processes lets employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain know that processes are in place to support them and what to expect from these processes.

**For employers:** Written processes act as a reminder for processes that may not be used often, are a communication tool for everyone involved, and can include relevant tools and resources (e.g., information about relevant benefits).

Sometimes processes and systems that make perfect sense to you are a complete mystery to others.

### Where to start?

It is helpful to think about having a process and also whether or not your employees and managers know a process exists and how to access it if they need to.

*Read on for more detailed information on workplace processes and how they are relevant for employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain:*

## Relevant Workplace Processes

Workplace **processes** are a set of steps that can be followed if a specific situation arises. These steps are captured (either in a written statement, a list, or as a flowchart) so that everyone involved or impacted by the process understands what's supposed to happen, when, where, and how.

When asked about HR processes relevant for employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain, most employers said that they “more or less” knew the process, but did not have anything written down.

When it comes to employees with arthritis, joint pain, or back pain some relevant processes include:

- Disclosure
- Accommodation
- Disability leave and return to work
- Health monitoring
- Workplace risk assessments

**Process mapping** is a planning and management tool that aids in the identification and review of how processes are working in an organization. Most mapping involves translating information (gathered from multiple sources) into a visual representation of the steps involved from start to finish. Some processes are complex and need time and careful review to capture all the decision points and different pathways available (e.g., requesting accommodations), while others are simpler to capture.

## Impact of Workplace Processes

Workplace processes are a key tool in helping employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain access workplace supports when needed. **Employees who receive workplace supports early tend to have better outcomes and lower rates of workplace disability than those who don't.** Mapping and communicating about appropriate processes help employees get access to supports early!

*“I think it would be a challenge to figure out how to request an accommodation. I don't think there is anything systemic in place, no one is proactively doing anything like that in my workplace right now.”*

*– Employee with RA*

**Keeping employees at work.** The impact of not accommodating an employee is often greater than an accommodation would cost. Many employers we interviewed emphasized the need to “keep employees at work” instead of focusing on “return to work.” Supporting employees to be healthy at work helps reduce costly sick time and disability leave and has better outcomes for both employees and employers.

**A mapped out process shows your employees that you have thought about how to support them to be healthy at work.** It lets everyone know what the process is and provides accessible information so that when your employees need it, they feel prepared. It also provides managers with the tools and resources they need to start a process.

## Where to Start?

Where you start depends on where you are at. This can be determined by completing our Employer Workplace Self-Assessment Tool. *How did you score?*

If you discovered that you don't have any formal processes in your workplace or you don't know much about process mapping, the "process consultant" website's *Process Mapping Step by Step Guide*<sup>1</sup> is a good place to start. After watching the video, look at the questions below to see where you can start building processes relevant for employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain.

If you already have a basic knowledge of processes and process mapping and want to make sure your workplace processes are clearly defined or well communicated, the questions below give you a chance to reflect on what you are doing, see if it is working, and see if the relevant people know about it.

### Do you have a process that is relevant to employees with arthritis, joint pain, or back pain?

#### Yes

- **What are you doing?**
  - What is the goal of the process?
  - What does the process include? e.g., steps taken, forms required, people involved, bottlenecks, resources?
  - Is your process up to date?
- **Is it working?**
  - Is the process doing what it's supposed to be doing?
  - Does it make sense? Is there anything missing? Is there room for improvement?
  - If someone doesn't know the process, could they complete it?
  - Do employees agree that the process works?
- **Who knows about it?**
  - Does everyone involved in the process know about it? Do they agree that this is the best way to reach the desired result?
  - Have you involved the employees?
- **How do you use it?**
  - Do you follow the process when the relevant situation arises?
  - Do you share the process with others involved in the situation?
  - Have employees referred to the process/process map when a relevant situation arose?
  - Do your employees know how to start the process? Do your frontline leaders (e.g., principals) know how to start the process?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://theprocessconsultant.com/>

## Do you have a process that is relevant to employees with arthritis, joint pain, or back pain?

### No

- **When the situation occurs, figure out what you are currently doing and your desired end state.**
  - Think about what you actually want to achieve. Once you know what your goal is, you can figure out the steps needed to reach it.
  - How will you use the process? How the process will be used dictates the level of detail and rigour needed when process mapping.
- **Map what you are currently doing.**
  - Write down all the steps, people involved, forms, etc. that currently take place when this kind of situation occurs.
  - Map out the entire process before you start highlighting issues and trying to improve it. Note existing issues and address them once you have a complete picture of the process.
- **Involve the people who will need to use the process.**
  - They know the current system and can comment on what's working, what's not working, and how to get past those issues. This includes managers and employees.
- **Include alternative "paths."**
  - Although process mapping will show the "typical process," employees will have different situations and require different pathways that they will need to follow – thinking about and planning for alternatives can help support employers and employees when these situations come up.
- **Communicate about the process.**
  - How will you let people know that the process exists and how to find it? e.g., have processes related to arthritis, joint and back pain in a health and wellness section of the company intranet site or inform new hires of processes when onboarding.
  - Use the process to promote open communication and awareness – let your employees know you can help them and be available if they need your help (make sure people know where to find answers).

Some workplaces may benefit from having more detailed and formalized process maps; others may need some guidelines including necessary steps, forms, and available resources. Although not a traditional part of process mapping, having a list of resources to accompany the processes that can be used by employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain is valuable.

Resources you can include in a process map:

- List of the forms needed and where to access them
- Resources or tools related to protecting employee privacy
- Information on arthritis, joint pain, and back pain, their impact on people at work, and communication checklists

## Involving employees

When creating or reviewing current processes, involve the people who will be using it as much as it is practical to do so. Involving your employees is particularly useful when thinking about what the goal of the process is and identifying if it is working. Further, it encourages transparency and clear communication of the processes relevant to your employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain.

Knowing about the processes allows employees to be aware of what the process includes (so they know what to do, reducing anxiety and fear) and also allows them to prepare. Here is an example:

A fifth-grade teacher discloses to their principal that they have arthritis and are starting to find it hard to keep-up with their students in PE. The principal has not had an employee disclose arthritis before and isn't sure where to start. The principal contacts their HR advisor who directs them to the existing processes and process map for accommodating an employee. The principal can see the process that they will go through with their employee and what their role will be. The principal also shares the process map with the teacher, who can see the process and their role. Both the principal and teacher know what to expect and what their responsibilities are.

The process map includes the steps and documents needed to accommodate the teacher, as well as tools and resources. The resources give the principal an idea of what accommodations may be helpful for the teacher (e.g., relevant health benefits, trading tasks that cause pain). The teacher uses the process map to see what steps are involved and to come prepared with suggestions of accommodations that they think would help them (e.g., have a TA for PE who can take on the more active parts of the class), and also to think about a communication plan (e.g., decide how and when the principal will check-in with them and what they will say to the teacher's colleagues).

Although the HR advisor is the main person accommodating the teacher, the process map allows the teacher and the principal to be on the same page and gives them an idea of what to expect and how to prepare.

### Employee Role

- *In developing workplace processes:* Employees can provide input on drafts of work processes, review current processes, and identify processes that need improvement.
- *Using workplace processes:* Sharing workplace processes with employees also highlights their role and responsibilities in that process.

For more information about workplace processes and why they are important for employees with arthritis, joint pain, and back pain, visit our online *Tools and Resources* for articles and links:  
<http://makingitworkforemployers.ca/tools-and-resources/>