Ask your employer for accommodations

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If you have a disability, and you work or are applying for a job, you can ask the employer to make changes to the way things are usually done at work (ask the employer to accommodate your disability). Learn when and how to ask for accommodations.

What can I do if I have a disability and I want to keep my job?

If you have or acquire a disability while working, your disability might affect the way you do your job. Your job responsibilities could make your condition worse. Or you might lose your job if you can't keep doing it the same way anymore.

It's up to you to take the first step. You have the right to **ask your employer to accommodate** your disability. An accommodation is any change at work that lets you perform a job or enjoy a work opportunity. This can include a change to a policy, work environment, or how things are done at work to remove a disability-related obstacle for you.

An employer must make reasonable accommodation for you if you have an impairment or disability that greatly limits your ability to do a job, and you would be able to perform the job once provided the reasonable accommodation.

You can get reasonable accommodations from your employer if you're a **qualified** employee with disabilities. **Qualified** means you meet the requirements of the position and can perform its fundamental duties (**essential functions**) if you're provided a reasonable accommodation.

What accommodations can I ask for?

You can ask for any accommodation considered "**reasonable**" that will help you to do the job or enjoy a work opportunity. Think about what specific challenges you're having at work, how they're connected to your disability, and what you think your employer could do to overcome that challenge.

Here are some examples of accommodations:

- Short-term leave of absence, especially if you're recovering from injuries
- Sitting on a stool, instead of standing, while working in a packing house
- Limiting how much weight you lift - someone else might have to do that part of the job
- Part-time or modified work schedule
- Getting new equipment or modifying existing equipment
- Allowing you to wear a brace while you work
- Transfer to a different position that you're also qualified to do

When do I ask for a reasonable accommodation?

You can ask for accommodations at any stage of the employment process. You can ask when applying or interviewing for a job, or while you're doing the job. You can ask for an accommodation while doing the job even if you didn't ask when you applied or after you got the job offer.

Can't I just ask my doctor to make request an accommodation for me?

You can and should do it yourself. You know your disability and day-to-day job duties best.

What is the interactive process?

Your employer might decide that your request is reasonable as it is and agree to it. But even if they don't approve your exact proposed accommodation, they must work with you to come up with an alternative proposal that would be effective for you and work for the employer. This is called the "**interactive process**" and could also include, for example, you providing additional information from your doctor, or getting an exam to determine your current physical capacity.

> If your disability-related need isn't known or obvious to your employer, the employer can ask your medical provider for additional documentation.

The employer may deny your precise accommodation request if the accommodation would cause the employer **"undue hardship."** What undue hardship means can vary depending on the employer. For example, what's too expensive for a mom-and-pop business wouldn't be too expensive for a large chain outlet.

What if the employer denied my accommodation request and didn't offer any other options?

If your employer denied your request without proposing an alternative or otherwise starting the interactive process, or won't tell you why the request was denied, you can appeal the decision by going up the chain of command at work, filing a grievance with your union if you have one, or filing a complaint with the state Human Rights Commission (https://wahum.my.site.com/FileaComplaintOnline/s/?language=en_US). You have 180 days to file a discrimination complaint with HRC. You should also try to talk to a lawyer (https://welalaw.org/members/).

What if my employer gets mad at me for asking for an accommodation?

If your employer takes revenge on you (retaliates against you) for requesting an accommodation, you should report the retaliation to someone higher up in your workplace or contact the state Human Rights Commission (https://www.hum.wa.gov/). You have 180 days to file a discrimination complaint with HRC.

How many accommodations can I have?

You can make as many requests as needed, whenever you need them. The employer should respond to each request promptly. You can also make separate accommodation requests for different disabilities if you have more than one disability.

When can't I ask for an accommodation at work?

If you're an independent contractor (https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=162-16-230), or you work for

family members, you don't have the same right to reasonable accommodations at work as other employees.

How to ask for a reasonable accommodation

We recommend these steps:

1. Make your request in writing by letter or email, so you have a record of it. Your employer may have a form for you to fill out. Keep a copy. Whether you fill in a form or write your own letter, the information you should include is the same.

2. Start your written request by stating that you're a person with a disability and that you need changes at work related to your disability. **You don't have to give a specific diagnosis**. And you don't have to mention any laws or use the words "reasonable accommodation."

> **Example:** You have diabetes, which causes numbness in your feet (neuropathy). You must stand for long periods at work, which exacerbates your neuropathy. You can just say in your request, "I'm writing to request a reasonable accommodation due to a disability-related difficulty at work."

3. Focus on the limitations or specific symptoms that make it hard to do your job. Your employer doesn't necessarily know much about your disability, or how it can affect your work life. Identify the job-related tasks affected by your disability-related limitations and how your limitations or symptoms affect them.

> In the example above, you could put, "I have a disability that causes swelling, pain, and numbness in my feet when I stand for long periods. As you know, my job requires a lot of standing."

4. State what accommodation you're requesting. Explain how your requested accommodation will be workable (reasonable) and allow you to perform your duties fully.

> In the example above, you could put, "I'd like to request a stool to sit on while I count the cash drawer. This would help my symptoms, and I could still do my other work tasks while standing."

5. Ask your doctor for a letter of support to confirm your limitations. Discuss your job duties with your doctor and share your draft accommodation request with the doctor so they can confirm your limitations in a helpful way.

6. Present the request to your manager or to the human resources department. Ask for a timely response to your request, such as one to 2 weeks from the date of your request.

7. Take part in the interactive process, if the employer responds to your accommodation request with an alternative proposal.

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