

WORKING WITH LONG COVID

Guide for colleagues
to support those with
long COVID

The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 160,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Introduction to this guide

An estimated [1.3 million people](#) were experiencing long COVID as at January 2022. Some have ongoing symptoms that are serious enough to prevent them from working. Many feel able to do some work but say they experience barriers that prevent them from returning to work, or working well.

As a new, potentially serious, health condition, many people with long COVID face a period of great uncertainty as they wait for confirmation of a diagnosis and an effective management plan.

Having a long-term health condition such as long COVID can have a big impact on how someone feels about being able to return to work, and their ability to stay in work. This impact can be lessened when they have support and understanding from their employer and their work colleagues.

This guide is designed to help colleagues support other employees with long COVID return to and stay in work. It has been developed by Affinity Health at Work, the University of Sheffield and the CIPD, and outlines practical recommendations developed from the CIPD [Working with long COVID](#) research. It draws on evidence and research with returning workers, line managers, occupational health, employment advisers, and rehabilitation professionals as well as HR professionals and the [Long Covid Support group](#).

What is long COVID?

Long COVID is defined by [NICE](#) as *'signs and symptoms that develop during or following an infection consistent with COVID-19 which continue for more than 12 weeks and are not explained by an alternative diagnosis'*.

The three [most common debilitating symptoms](#) reported are fatigue, breathing issues, and cognitive dysfunction (that is, memory loss, brain fog, and concentration and speech difficulties). To find out more about long COVID, see our report [Working with long COVID](#).

Everyone's experience of long COVID is unique to them. Symptoms can be unpredictable and fluctuate over time, so your colleague may have a period of recovery followed by a sudden relapse, sometimes with new or different symptoms. This means they may need to have multiple periods of absence to cope with any setback to their health. A relapse is most likely when people push themselves to perform to the level they did before.

What can you do to help a colleague with long COVID?

Many people do not know what to say or do when a colleague has a long-term health condition such as long COVID. It's important to take your lead from your colleague – some individuals may not want to discuss their health condition, or need some time to talk about it. But most people would prefer a genuine enquiry about how they are, especially if they are returning to work after being off sick.

If your colleague is returning to work after a period of absence, they are likely to be experiencing mixed feelings. They might be looking forward to returning to a sense of normality, but may also feel apprehensive about how they will manage their work and whether or not they will be able to maintain their health when back at work. Many people with long COVID need to return to work slowly, gradually building up their hours and tasks, sometimes over a period of months. Knowing they have the support and understanding of their colleagues can make all the difference to whether someone feels able to cope with a return to work and their ongoing responsibilities.

When people are unwell or have a health condition that requires ongoing management, there are certain things that can help them manage their health and work. These include:

- Individual actions
- Group actions by their colleagues
- Line manager actions
- actions taken by their Organisation
- help and support from Outside their organisation.

We call this the *IGLOO for working with long COVID*.

Use this checklist to see what you can do to strengthen your colleague's IGLOO to stay well at work. Read the statements in the 'Group actions' and the 'Do I...' column, answering 'yes', 'no' or 'sometimes' and marking your answer in the column provided.

Checklist to support the IGLOO for working with long COVID

Actions for IGLOO level	Do I...? Yes, No, Sometimes	I need to... If you answered 'sometimes' or 'no', what else would be helpful?	I can make this happen by... Need help and advice? Ask friends and family, HR, occupational health, colleagues, charity/support groups, union reps and so on.
Individual level			
Do I... help my colleague to pace themselves and encourage them to rest when they need to?			
Do I... encourage my colleague to share with me (where they feel comfortable) how their symptoms impact their ability to complete certain work tasks?			
Do I... know where and how to signpost information about their <u>employment rights</u> in relation to their condition?			
Group actions by colleague's level			
Do I... understand what long COVID is and how it might impact my colleague at work?			
Do I... offer practical support, such as offering to help with challenging tasks?			
Do I... treat my colleague in the same way as I did before, not as someone who is different or damaged?			
Do I... encourage our whole team to prioritise and talk openly about our health and wellbeing?			
Line manager level			
Do I... think that my line manager is aware of what long COVID is and how it can impact on my colleague's health and work?			
Do I... accept that my line manager may have made individualised work adjustments for my colleague to help them manage their health and work?			
Do I... check in with my line manager about what my colleague wants me to know about how long COVID impacts them?			
Do I... look out to make sure my colleague is having regular wellbeing checks with my line manager?			
Organisational level			
Do I... know what the absence management policy and processes are and how they can accommodate fluctuating conditions like long COVID?			
Do I... support my colleague to access flexible and creative work adjustments to support their health and work?			
Do I... see that my colleague receives support and adjustments based on their symptoms, not their diagnosis (which may take some time)?			
Do I... work in a company where inclusion and wellbeing are prioritised? If not, could I share information on the benefits of <u>wellbeing at work</u> to start the conversation in my organisation?			
Outside level			
Do I... know where my colleague can access support outside of the organisation, for example: access to occupational health, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, long COVID clinics, vocational support, psychological therapies, charities, for example the Long Covid Support group?			

Remember

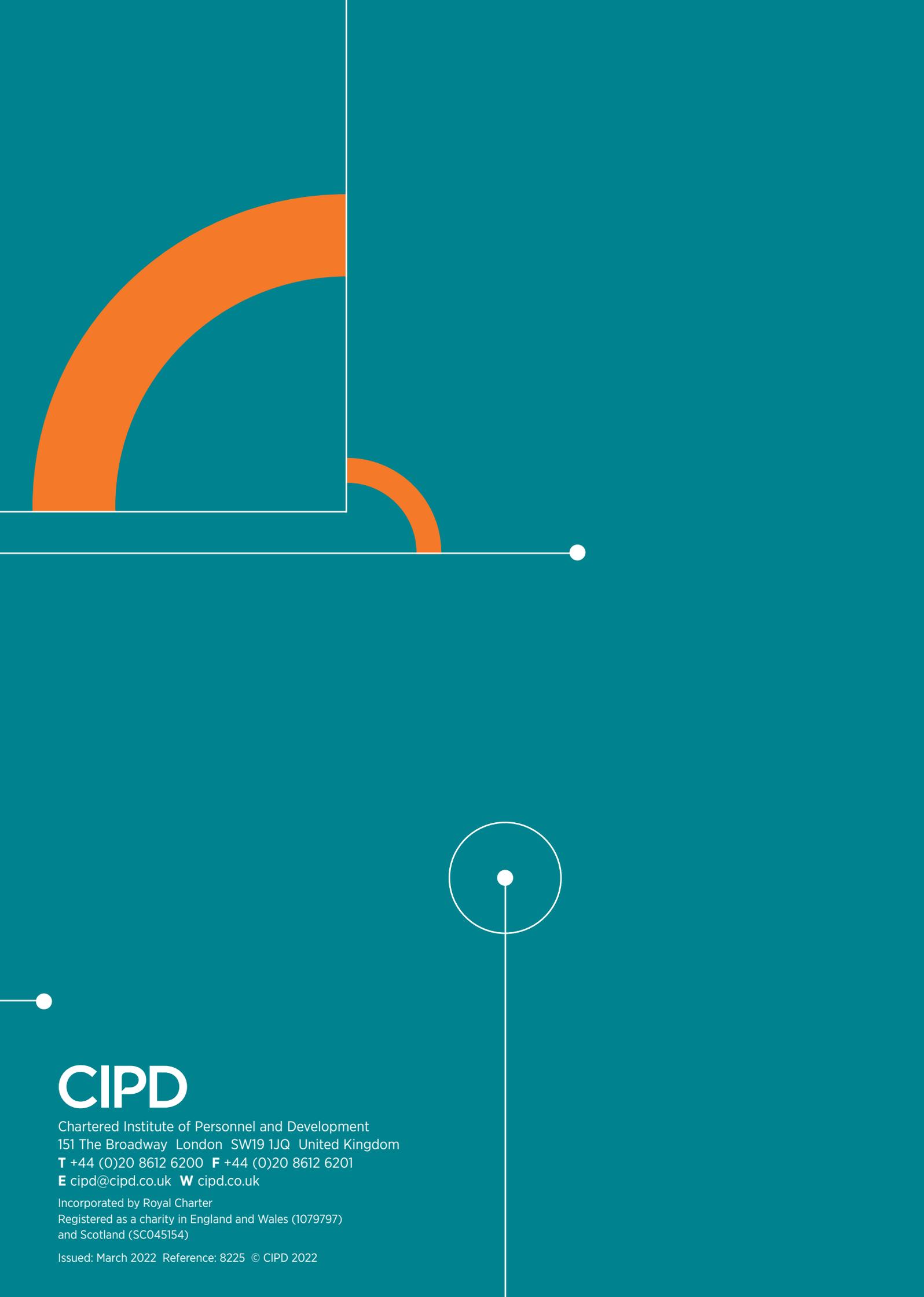
Working with long COVID is not always easy, but having support can make a huge difference. If you are not sure what your colleague would find helpful, ask them. Talk through the checklist with them and identify some concrete actions that you can take to help them build their IGLOO for working with long COVID.

COVID-19 and related resources

[NHS advice on long COVID](#)

[NHS: Your COVID Recovery](#)

[Society of Occupational Medicine COVID-19 return to work guide for recovering workers](#)



CIPD

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
151 The Broadway London SW19 1JQ United Kingdom
T +44 (0)20 8612 6200 **F** +44 (0)20 8612 6201
E cipd@cipd.co.uk **W** cipd.co.uk

Incorporated by Royal Charter
Registered as a charity in England and Wales (1079797)
and Scotland (SC045154)

Issued: March 2022 Reference: 8225 © CIPD 2022