



CYSTIC FIBROSIS IN THE WORKPLACE

Twenty years ago few children with cystic fibrosis (CF) survived to school age. Today with new treatment most people with CF are planning for productive adult years. Older people with CF are now marrying, having families, going on to further education and finding permanent employment. There are now more adults than children who have CF.

Every person with Cystic Fibrosis is affected differently by the disease and symptoms and treatment varies from person to person.

While heavy, physical work is not appropriate for some people with CF others can manage it without any problems.

People who have CF are very aware of their condition, and it is unlikely that any person with CF would apply for a position beyond his or her physical ability. Most people with CF do not like attention being drawn to their condition. They usually lead a normal life and look healthy. It is not necessary for fellow workers to be aware of the disease unless the affected person chooses to share that information.

There is no legal obligation for an employee to disclose their disability unless it is likely to affect their performance to meet the requirements of the job or course. Once a disclosure has been made work related adjustments may need to be made to support the person with CF. (It is important to remember that an employee can successfully meet the essential selection criteria for the job requirements with appropriate education or work related adjustments). Sometimes, students or employees disclose their condition even though they don't require any specific adjustments at this time. This may be done to alert you to the possibility of future requirements.

The same criteria should be used in assessment of the person with CF as is used on anyone applying for a position. The performance of someone with CF should not differ significantly from other workers.

Workplace considerations and adjustments

Hospitalisations and clinic visits

Most adults with CF attend regular (3 monthly) visits to the cystic fibrosis clinic at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. On occasions according to the person's lung function and health there may be the need to be admitted to the ward for one or two weeks to receive extra antibiotics, physiotherapy and a review of the persons' diet.

Coughing

Some people with CF may cough on a regular basis, as their body is attempting to get rid of mucus on the lungs. This is nothing to be alarmed about. It is common for adults with CF to be asked if they have a cold or if they smoke as a result of their cough (which they can find very annoying). CF is not contagious, so you cannot catch it from a person with CF coughing.

Managing medication at work

For people who are required to take medication while at work there are a range of strategies that can assist them to manage this successfully including:

- Scheduling break times to coincide with medicating times
- Some modifications to work routine and task order may be required in order to manage some conditions and medications. For instance, people with respiratory disorders may experience fatigue if not given adequate rest times or capacity to rotate between physical and sedentary jobs.
- Provision in workplace of safe, secure storage place for medication that is away from heat, damp and light as these can damage medications
- Provision of a private space in which medication can be taken or administered correctly
- Sufficient workspace may need to be allocated to people requiring use of oxygen equipment for respiratory disorders.

Hospital admissions

- If your employee needs to take time off in the future for hospital admissions or clinic appointments is it possible to establish a contingency plan about how any absences will be managed? Can your employee "bank" time in advance during times when he/she is not required to go to hospital?
- Can your employee complete any duties via a laptop, while they are in hospital? Or can he/she work during the day and return to the hospital at night?

If you have any further questions about CF and how it affects people in the workplace please feel welcome to contact Cystic Fibrosis Western Australia.

If you would like an information presentation (as long as your employee is happy about this) we can come to your workplace at a suitable time.

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