



**Returning to work after medical leave?
Get your feet back in the door – with pedometers!**

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Picture a nice long vacation with your feet in sandals. Now picture the first day back in work boots. As you know, it can surprise you how “out of shape” your legs and feet feel after even a short time away. Those first few work shifts feel longer than you recall.



Perhaps you have been away from work more than a short time, on a medical leave. Physical problems, such as illness, injury, or elective surgery, and even non-physical mental health problems, can cause several weeks to months of absence. Once you finally feel better, and become optimistic about returning to work, stop to consider your humble feet. Are they ready, too?

Long shifts challenge feet and legs, and many jobs require prolonged walking and standing. Mail carriers often walk 7-10 miles per day. Some manufacturing employees do, too, though measuring intermittent indoor walking is harder to do. Often it totals more than one would guess. Warehouse workers may walk as much as mail carriers do, but without realizing it.

I have a reliable way for you to find out if your legs and feet have the stamina you need to return to work successfully. Simply get two inexpensive pedometers. Give one to a co-worker who holds the same job as you, and who works a shift of equal length. Try to find someone of approximately your height. Ask them to wear the pedometer during a work shift, including overtime if that happens commonly. Then use their step count as your goal. Wear the other pedometer around your house, yard, neighborhood, and on errands. Find out if you tolerate as many steps in a day as your co-worker did during a work shift.

Don't wait until “late in the game” to discover this. As you know, paid leave won't last forever! Well before yours runs out, use this pedometer method to learn your stamina. If the pedometer shows you have a long way to go, use a calendar to write a walking schedule to get ready. Increase your daily step count with slow, steady progression. You will need one to two weeks to gradually add 2,000 additional steps (about one mile) per day. So, if you must walk 10,000 steps per day (about five miles) but can only comfortably walk 6,000 (about three miles) now, you will need two to four weeks to prepare. If your job requires heavy work boots, wear them during this program. Otherwise, on the first day back, they may feel like a ton!

Of course, during any medical leave from work, you remain under your doctor's care. Always make your doctor aware of the physical demands of your job. And get your doctor's permission to begin your return-to-work walking program. Ask him/her early in the course of your care. That way you will have more time to get ready with this two-pedometer method.

Don't wait until you're on your last legs!