

Return to Work

Return to Work - Functional Abilities Evaluation

On this page

[What is a functional abilities evaluation \(FAE\)?](#)

[Who completes a functional abilities evaluation?](#)

[What are the benefits of a functional abilities evaluation?](#)

[What is included in a functional abilities evaluation?](#)

[Can my employer request a functional abilities evaluation?](#)

[Where can I get more information?](#)

What is a functional abilities evaluation (FAE)?

A functional abilities evaluation (or functional capacity evaluation) is a comprehensive, objective evaluation of a worker's abilities. The functional abilities evaluation will evaluate current abilities and identify any barriers, and may highlight any immediate or long-term risks that may occur if regular work was to resume. A functional abilities evaluation uses measurable tests that can be interpreted and compared to the job demands.

Functional abilities evaluations can be used for both physical and cognitive abilities.

For more information on return to work programs, please see the following OSH Answers documents:

- Return to Work – [Program Overview](#)
- Return to Work – [Accommodation](#)
- Return to Work – [Job Demands Analysis](#)
- Mental Health – [Return to Work](#)

Who completes a functional abilities evaluation?

Functional abilities evaluations are often performed by healthcare professionals such as registered physiotherapists, occupational therapists, kinesiologists, psychotherapists, psychologists, or psychiatrists. The healthcare provider must have the required knowledge, skills, and experience to assess function and compare this function to workplace requirements.

When completing a functional abilities evaluation, the health care provider will focus on abilities, NOT disabilities. They will determine what the injured worker can do without the risk of further injury.

What are the benefits of a functional abilities evaluation?

The evaluation may also be used to determine any job modifications that are required to maintain current abilities and prevent a re-injury.

A functional abilities evaluation can help avoid unsafe work conditions by identifying the gap between abilities and job requirements. The functional abilities evaluation will provide the employer with information about what the injured worker can do. The return to work team will use this information to plan appropriate accommodations for the worker.

For example, a functional abilities evaluation may offer ergonomic solutions to assist in the return to work program and may provide additional recommendations for further treatment.

What is included in a functional abilities evaluation?

The functional abilities evaluation will examine the worker's physical and cognitive (mental) abilities by reviewing medical information, interviewing the worker, and conducting physical tests for function.

Throughout the evaluation, the health care professional will also be looking for consistency in effort and any barriers throughout the process.

A functional abilities evaluation will generally include:

- A musculoskeletal examination.
- Functional tasks such as walking, climbing stairs, gripping, lifting, pushing, and pulling.
- Tests of fine motor skills.

Standardized tests, questionnaires, and interviews may also be used to evaluate cognitive abilities and psychological behaviour as it relates to the job. These aspects may include:

- Memory, attention, and higher level cognitive abilities such as problem solving and judgement.

- Safety awareness.
- Reading, writing, and speech.
- Interpersonal skills required for the job.
- Hearing, vision, and perception.

The goal is to simulate regular tasks and job-specific skills to determine if there are any risks present to return to regular work activities.

Can my employer request a functional abilities evaluation?

Yes. Following an injury, your health insurance provider, employer, or worker's compensation board may request a functional abilities evaluation.

This evaluation will help your employer in the return to work process as it allows for an objective collection of information on current abilities. Note that a worker must sign a release before the health care professional can give the information on the form to the employer.

A functional abilities evaluation is only one type of evaluation that may be requested during the return to work process.

Where can I get more information?

There are many documents available online that provide a functional abilities evaluation template. For example*:

- Government of Canada: Disability Management in the Federal Public Service resource, including a [Functional Abilities Form](#)
- WorkSafeBC: [Functional Capacity Evaluation or a Cognitive Functional Capacity Evaluation Report](#)

(*We have mentioned these organizations as a means of providing a potentially useful referral. You should contact the organization(s) directly for more information about their services. Please note that mention of these organizations does not represent a recommendation or endorsement by CCOHS of these organizations over others of which you may be aware.)

Fact sheet first published: 2022-07-29

Fact sheet last revised: 2022-07-29

Disclaimer

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy, currency and completeness of the information, CCOHS does not guarantee, warrant, represent or undertake that the information provided is correct, accurate or current. CCOHS is not liable for any loss, claim, or demand arising directly or indirectly from any use or reliance upon the information.