



Supporting Employees with Fibromyalgia: A Guide for Canadian Employers



Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition that causes widespread pain, fatigue, and cognitive difficulties (often called "fibro fog"). Symptoms vary from person to person and can fluctuate in severity. While invisible, fibromyalgia can impact an employee's ability to perform certain tasks. Many employees with fibromyalgia are high-performing and hardworking but may experience "flare-ups"—periods when pain and fatigue significantly impact their ability to work.

Employees with fibromyalgia may need accommodations occasionally, long term, or on an ongoing basis.

Workplace accommodation for people with fibromyalgia

Employers in Canada have a duty to accommodate employees with disabilities, including those with fibromyalgia, to the point of undue hardship. The specific requirements vary depending on whether the employer falls under federal or provincial/territorial area, as each region has its own labour laws and human rights legislation.

This guide does not provide legal advice but offers practical suggestions to help employers support employees with fibromyalgia. Each workplace is unique, and it is important to find accommodations that are reasonable for both the employer and the employee.



Helpful Workplace Accommodation Ideas

Accommodations will depend on the employee's specific needs and individual job responsibilities and requirements. Some common workplace accommodations for employees with fibromyalgia may include:

- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Adjust start/end times or offer remote work options on flare-up days.
- **Ergonomic Support:** Provide sit-stand desks, ergonomic chairs, wrist supports, ergonomic mouse or other tools to reduce strain.
- **Workload Management:** Modify tasks, allow task rotation, or redistribute physically demanding duties.
- **Rest Periods:** Allow short breaks or offer modified break schedules to manage fatigue and pain.
- **Environmental Adjustments:** Provide a quiet workspace, reduce exposure to bright lights, loud noises, strong scents, or temperature extremes that may worsen symptoms.
- **Support for Cognitive Function:** Allow the use of memory aids, provide written instructions, or offer extra time for complex tasks.
- **Return-to-Work Strategies:** Implement gradual return-to-work plans following medical leave due to flare-ups.
- **Mobility Aids:** Provide a rollator (walker with wheels) and storage space if needed. A rollator can assist with your walking and balance. Some have baskets that assist with carrying a heavy load, e.g. laptop, books.
- **Cost-Effective Solutions:** Many accommodations, such as flexible scheduling and remote work, are low-cost or free and can significantly improve employee performance.
- For more Accommodation Ideas click here <https://askjan.org/disabilities/Myalgic-Encephalomyelitis-Chronic-Fatigue-Syndrome.cfm/#ideas>





Employer Considerations

When it comes to accommodating an employee with fibromyalgia, there are several things which managers and supervisors should consider.

Key considerations for managers and supervisors include:

- **Open Communication:** Encourage a supportive dialogue with employees to understand their needs while respecting privacy. Many employees with fibromyalgia hesitate to disclose their condition, but honest communication helps ensure appropriate accommodations.
- **Medical Documentation:** Employers may request relevant medical documentation to support accommodation requests but should do so respectfully and in accordance with workplace policies.
- **Training for Managers & Staff:** Educating staff on fibromyalgia and workplace inclusivity can create a more supportive environment.
- **Workplace Policies:** Ensure HR policies reflect a commitment to workplace inclusivity and accommodation.
- **Legal and Regulatory Compliance:** While this guide does not cover specific laws, employers should be aware that both federal and provincial/territorial human rights commissions provide guidance on accommodating employees with disabilities. A list of references and helpful links is included below for Canada and each of the provinces to assist in finding out compliance requirements.

The Benefits of Accommodation

Supporting employees with fibromyalgia benefits both the employee and the organization. Employers who proactively accommodate employees can reduce absenteeism, improve retention, and create a more positive workplace culture. For specific legal obligations, consult your provincial/territorial labour standards office or human rights commission.

For further guidance, employers are encouraged, to consult their provincial/territorial labour standards office or human rights commission to better understand specific obligations in their area.



References and helpful links for Managers and Supervisors:

Canada:

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/reference-guide.html#h2.10-h3.5>
- <https://www.supportedemployment.ca/resources/employers/hrtoolkit/>
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/public-service-hiring-guides/guide-assessing-persons-disabilities/guide-assessing-persons-disabilities/guide-assessing-persons-disabilities-determine-implement-assessment-accommodations-chronic-illnesses.html>

Union environments:

- <https://pipsc.ca/labour-relations/stewards/pocket-guides/pocket-guide-duty-to-accommodate>

Ideas for accommodation:

- <https://askjan.org/disabilities/Myalgic-Encephalomyelitis-Chronic-Fatigue-Syndrome.cfm/#ideas>

Provinces:

BC –

- <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/careers-myhr/managers-supervisors/employee-labour-relations/managing-accommodation/managers-guide-reasonable-accommodation>
- <https://bchumanrights.ca/human-rights/rights-and-responsibilities/employer/#responsibilities-under-the-code-duty-to-accommodate>
- https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/managers-supervisors/managing-employee-labour-relations/managers_guide_to_reasonable_accommodation.pdf

AB –

- <https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca/issues-at-work/duty-to-accommodate-at-work/>

SK –

- <https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/for-employers/duty-to-accommodate/>
- <https://saskatchewanhumanrights.ca/>

References and helpful links for Managers and Supervisors:

Provinces:

MB –

- <https://www.manitoba.ca/csc/policyman/accomm.html>
- https://www.manitobahumanrights.ca/education/pdf/guidelines/guideline_reasonableaccommodation.pdf

ON –

- <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-primer-guide-developing-human-rights-policies-and-procedures> (Section 13.5)
- <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/8-duty-accommodate>
- <https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-mental-health-disabilities-and-addictions/13-duty>

QC –

- <https://aseq-ehaq.ca/pdf/Right-to-Reasonable-Accommodation.pdf>
<https://www.cdpcj.qc.ca/en>
- <https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/c-12#:~:text=Every%20person%20has%20a%20right%20to%20full%20and%20equal%20recognition,law%2C%20religion%2C%20political%20convictions%2C>

NL –

- <https://thinkhumanrights.ca/know-your-rights/duty-to-accommodate/>

NB –

- <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/hrc-cdp/PDF/Guideline-Accommodating-Disability-at-Work-New-Brunswick.pdf>

PE –

- <https://www.peihumanrights.ca/education-and-resources/duty-to-accommodate>

YT –

- <https://yukonhumanrights.ca/resources/>



References and helpful links for Managers and Supervisors:

Provinces:

NT –

- <https://nwthumanrights.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Employment-Guide-WEB.pdf>

NU –

- <https://nhrt.ca/resources/>

