



Improving Health and Employment Outcomes for Employees with Heart Disease:

The Value of Cardiac Rehabilitation



Heart disease death rates among working-age adults (25 to 64 years) have not improved since 2011 and have increased among adults aged 55 to 64.^{1,2} Meanwhile, workers aged 65 or older, who are at greatest risk of heart disease, make up the fastest growing segment of the U.S. workforce.³ Employees are better able to do their work and remain employed when workplace policies and practices support their efforts to manage chronic conditions like heart disease.⁴

Cardiac Rehabilitation 101

Cardiac Rehabilitation (CR) is a comprehensive lifestyle change intervention that includes supervised physical activity, patient education, risk factor management, and psychosocial services.⁵ CR is commonly delivered in an outpatient hospital setting, but can also be delivered remotely.^{6,7} There is strong and consistent evidence that patients who complete CR have better exercise capacity, fewer cardiac events and hospital readmissions, lower healthcare costs, and less risk of premature death.^{5,8} Evidence also shows CR may improve patients' ability to return to work and stay employed.⁹

Despite these benefits, only one-third of adults who have qualifying medical conditions participate in CR.¹⁰ Evidence shows that patient education, physician recommendation, care coordination, and individual patient supports improve CR enrollment and adherence.¹¹

Who Benefits from Cardiac Rehabilitation?

National clinical practice guidelines strongly recommend CR for people who have had:

- A heart attack.
- Stable angina (chest pain).
- A stent or angioplasty.
- A diagnosis of heart failure with reduced ejection fraction (<35%).
- A bypass, valve, or heart or heart-lung transplant surgery.¹²

Steps Occupational Health Teams Can Take to Support Employees with Heart Disease:

- Promote employee awareness of the [benefits of CR](#) and [what it entails](#).
- Advise medically qualified employees to speak with their health care providers about [referral to CR](#).
- Partner with nearby [CR programs](#) to facilitate enrollment and explore whether employees can use workplace exercise facilities for remotely supervised CR sessions.
- Encourage leadership and human resources staff to offer CR insurance coverage with low or no copayments, work schedule flexibilities, and paid sick leave.
- Recommend leadership adopt [supportive supervisory practices](#) to promote work-health balance and improve employee health and well-being.¹³
- Offer [workplace wellness programs](#) that include on-site heart-healthy food options, on-site group and individual fitness opportunities, and education to reduce the risk of cardiac events.
- Design healthy work schedule patterns to combat chronic fatigue and support heart-healthy lifestyle changes, recognizing that long work hours and shiftwork are associated with cardiac events.^{14,15}
- Encourage employers to increase job rewards and job decision latitude, and reduce exposure to work-related stressors.^{16,17,18}
- Provide [job accommodations](#) to facilitate return to work for employees following a cardiac event or heart disease diagnosis.¹⁹

Resources for Employees Who Have Qualifying Cardiac Conditions:

[Do It For You! Do It For Your Heart! Say Yes to Cardiac Rehabilitation](#) – one-page informational handout about the benefits of CR



[What's Holding You Back From Going to Cardiac Rehab?](#) – one-page handout with resources to address barriers to participation in CR



[State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies](#) – webpage with contact information for state agencies that may help CR-qualifying employees with functional impairments



[Cardiac Rehabilitation Communications Toolkit](#) – webpage with a collection of CR messages, fact sheets, and patient testimonials



Contact [Million Hearts®](#) at MillionHeartsCRC@cdc.gov for more information or to explore opportunities for further engagement.

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