

# Efficacy of temporary work modifications on disability related to musculoskeletal pain and depressive symptoms

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<b>Registration date</b> 25/10/2013	<b>Overall study status</b> Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input type="checkbox"/> Results
<b>Last Edited</b> 27/04/2018	<b>Condition category</b> Musculoskeletal Diseases	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data <input type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year

## Plain English summary of protocol

### Background and study aims

Previous research suggests that continuing to work with a suitable workload is beneficial for people with muscular aches or depressive symptoms with regard to health, return to work and work retention in the long run. We will carry out a study to find out whether temporary work modifications are effective in helping workers with muscular pain or depressive symptoms to return to work or stay at work. The study's findings will give new knowledge about the possibilities of work modifications in enhancing recovery from musculoskeletal pain and depressive symptoms and the possibilities of enhancing return to work.

### Who can participate?

Workers aged 18 to 60 who have sought medical advice in their occupational health service due to musculoskeletal pain or depressive symptoms will be invited to participate.

### What does the study involve?

At the first stage of the study we will recruit workers and follow their symptoms and work disability for one year. At the second stage (intervention phase) seminars will be given to the participating occupational physicians about initiating temporary work modifications at the workplace. The physicians will then look carefully at the potential of temporary work modifications for eligible workers and initiate them when considered as beneficial.

### What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Participating at the first stage does not involve benefits or risks to the worker. Participating at the second stage may improve recovery from pain or depressive symptoms. There is a possibility that the symptoms worsen if the work modifications are not adequate or you resume ordinary duties too early. In that case we will provide you a possibility to meet your doctor without delay.

### Where is the study run from?

Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (Finland)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?  
October 2013 to December 2017

Who is funding the study?

1. Finnish Work Environment Fund (Finland)
2. Academy of Finland (Finland)

Who is the main contact?

Professor Eira Viikari-Juntura  
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## Contact information

### Type(s)

Scientific

### Contact name

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## Additional identifiers

### Protocol serial number

33713

## Study information

### Scientific Title

Efficacy of temporary work modifications on disability related to musculoskeletal pain and depressive symptoms: a non-randomised controlled trial

### Study objectives

Our hypothesis is that continuing to work with a suitable workload is beneficial for subjects with musculoskeletal or depressive symptoms with regard to health outcomes, return to work and work retention at a longer perspective. Moreover, temporary modification of workload will enhance return to work and work retention in subjects with musculoskeletal or depressive symptoms.

### Ethics approval required

Old ethics approval format

### Ethics approval(s)

## **Study design**

Single-center controlled trial stepped-wedge design

## **Primary study design**

Interventional

## **Study type(s)**

Quality of life

## **Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied**

Musculoskeletal pain, depressive symptoms

## **Interventions**

We will apply the stepped wedge design, in which a group of participating occupational physicians recruits patients first to the control group and then starts to recruit patients to the intervention. Participating occupational physicians are enrolled to the study in small groups, who are first taught about the principles of the study (when starting to enrol controls) and will later participate in interactive seminars about how to initiate workplace modifications and discuss them with the workplace (when starting to recruit subjects to the intervention). This design enables the recruitment of cases and controls with a short time interval and we can thereby minimise the effects of changes in the work or societal environment on the results of the intervention.

Temporary work modifications prescribed by the occupational physician, e.g. workplace adaptations, amended duties, altered work hours or a phased RTW. Work modifications can be prescribed for a maximum of 1 month per visit and for a maximum of 3 months per disease spell.

## **Intervention Type**

Other

## **Phase**

Not Applicable

## **Primary outcome(s)**

1. Sustained return to work (>4 weeks at work without a new sickness absence spell)
2. Total number of sickness absence days during 12 months following recruitment to the study

## **Key secondary outcome(s)**

1. Intensity of musculoskeletal pain (VAS 0-10)
2. Interference of work (VAS 0-10) and sleep (VAS 0-10) by the pain and depressive symptoms (PHQ-9, <http://www.terveysportti.fi>), inquired via internet-based questionnaires at 0, 3, 6, 9 and 12 months after recruitment.

## **Completion date**

31/12/2017

## **Eligibility**

## **Key inclusion criteria**

Employees who seek medical advice in the occupational health service primarily due to musculoskeletal pain or depressive symptoms.

Specific inclusion criteria:

1. Age 18-60 years, male and female
2. Working full-time or nearly full-time (>30 hours per week)
3. Employed in current job for at least 4 months and employment likely to continue the following 12 months
4. Musculoskeletal pain (>4 on a scale of 0-10) or depressive symptoms (>1 positive response to two screening questions on depression (Arroll et al. BMJ. 2003 Nov 15;327(7424):1144-6)
5. Functional ability is not sufficient to perform current work tasks
6. Previous sickness absence <6 weeks during preceding 3 months

## **Participant type(s)**

Patient

## **Healthy volunteers allowed**

No

## **Age group**

Adult

## **Lower age limit**

18 years

## **Upper age limit**

60 years

## **Sex**

All

## **Key exclusion criteria**

1. Anticipated long absence from work during the following 12 months due to other reasons, e.g. pregnancy, studies, military service, alternation leave, absence due to other illness or its treatment (e.g. surgery, cytostatic therapy or radiation therapy)
2. Serious or acute disease requiring full sickness absence, e.g. febrile infection, active stage of inflammatory joint disease; serious mental disorder)
3. Other factors having significant effect on disability (e.g. serious conflict at the workplace, difficult personal life situation, current problem is due to a work accident, current insurance or workmen's compensation dispute, severe alcohol or drug dependency)

## **Date of first enrolment**

28/10/2013

## **Date of final enrolment**

30/11/2016

## **Locations**

## **Countries of recruitment**

Finland

**Study participating centre**  
**Finnish Institute of Occupational Health**  
PL 40  
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00251

## Sponsor information

**Organisation**  
The Finnish Work Environment Fund (Finland)

**ROR**  
<https://ror.org/02v046k89>

## Funder(s)

**Funder type**  
Government

**Funder Name**  
Finnish Work Environment Fund (Finland) (ref. 112257)

**Alternative Name(s)**  
Finnish Work Environment Fund, Työsuojelurahasto Arbetarskyddsfonden, Työsuojelurahasto | Helsinki, TSRahasto

**Funding Body Type**  
Government organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**  
National government

**Location**  
Finland

**Funder Name**  
Academy of Finland (Finland) (ref. 267589)

**Alternative Name(s)**

Academy of Finland, Suomen Akatemia, Finlands Akademi, AKA

**Funding Body Type**

Government organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**

Research institutes and centers

**Location**

Finland

## Results and Publications

**Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan**

The datasets generated will not be made publicly available due to sensitivity of the data and the small number of participants.

**IPD sharing plan summary**

Not expected to be made available

**Study outputs**

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
<a href="#">Protocol article</a>	protocol	18/05/2015		Yes	No
<a href="#">Participant information sheet</a>	Participant information sheet	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes