The Virtual Accommodations Lab
Hi, my name is Carla, and I am going to take you on a special Accommodations Tour! We’ll be making five stops along the way.

1. Office environment accommodations
2. Light demand occupations
3. Medium-heavy demand occupations
4. Healthcare occupations
5. Regulatory accommodation considerations

Many of these accommodations can be applied to virtual environments as well, if employees are in alternate work arrangements.
Accommodation do’s and don'ts

7 tips for an effective workplace accommodations program

1. Recognize the practicality in accommodating to keep skilled employees
2. Have a formal policy regarding workplace accommodations, including information on ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) and procedures to submit an accommodation request
3. Audit your job descriptions! These should be robust and very specific in terms of outlining necessary job functions
4. Share the wealth! Front line supervisors and managers should be trained to understand the workforce accommodation policies, even if they aren’t the final decision-maker
5. Foster a culture of diversity and inclusion by training supervisors and managers on recruiting, hiring, and retaining employees with disabilities
6. Evaluate accommodation requests by focusing on reasonable accommodations based on necessary job functions, while documenting and communicating clearly through the process
7. Keep in touch! Check in regularly with both the employee and the supervisor/manager

5 mistakes to avoid with ADA accommodations

1. Adopting an ‘Us vs. Them’ attitude; instead, focus on how the process can support business goals
2. Too many decision-makers; need to ensure consistency and legal compliance
3. Trying to prove the employee isn’t disabled, vs. evaluating the disability’s impact on essential job functions
4. Lack of communication; this will only lead to frustration and distrust
5. Closing the file [too early]. Have a regular cadence of follow-ups and check-ins even after the accommodation is implemented

First, let’s set the stage with some helpful tips and tricks for HR Managers/Supervisors.


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Consider these accommodations for your office staff to keep them safe and at work.

**Office environment accommodations**

- **Magnifiers or special monitors** – visual accommodations
- **Fluorescent light filters** – reduce visual strain, migraines or headaches
- **Service animals** – depression, stress, anxiety, other mental health issues
- **Ergonomic chair** – spine, hip, shoulder, wrist, arm conditions
- **Flexible schedules and breaks** – mental wellness
- **Sit/stand workstation** – conditions affecting the back/neck, lower extremities
- **Noise cancelling headphones** – anxiety, ADD, PTSD
- **Footrest** – ankle, foot, hip, knee or back conditions
- **Telephone amplifier or RELAY services** – hearing impairments
- **Eliminate environmental factors such as odors** – asthma, migraines or headaches
- **Keyboard trays/wrist rests** – wrist and upper extremity conditions
- **Dictation software** – visual impairments, conditions affecting upper extremities
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Light demand occupations put more stress on the body, whatever you can do to reduce repetition and stress helps.

1. Ergonomic air tools – upper extremities
2. Gripping tools – hand injuries and upper extremity conditions
3. Forearm support – upper extremity conditions
4. Offer an allowance or discount for appropriate safety footwear – foot or back conditions
5. Utilizations of stools or chairs for positions requiring extended periods of standing – foot or back conditions
6. Power or scissor lifts – back and lower extremity conditions
7. Private divider – PTSD, anxiety, mental wellness
8. Job restructuring to reduce repetitive motions such as twisting, bending, reaching – musculoskeletal conditions
9. Scheduled breaks, offering physical activities such as stretching or walking – overall physical and mental wellness
10. Cross-training to break up repetitive tasks and reduce risks – stress, foot or back conditions
11. Cushioned, anti-fatigue mat – lower extremity or back conditions
12. Scooters or power chairs – assist when unable to ambulate after injury or surgery
13. Cross-training to break up repetitive tasks and reduce risks – stress, foot or back conditions
14. Scheduled breaks, offering physical activities such as stretching or walking – overall physical and mental wellness
15. Cross-training to break up repetitive tasks and reduce risks – stress, foot or back conditions
16. Cushioned, anti-fatigue mat – lower extremity or back conditions
17. Scooters or power chairs – assist when unable to ambulate after injury or surgery
Medium-heavy demand occupations

There are several ways to prevent injury and help employees stay productive. Here are some ideas.

1. Consider a team lift or equipment to assist with lifting – musculoskeletal conditions
2. Grippers or forearm straps – reduce strain on upper extremities, back, legs
3. Power lifts or scissor lifts – back, lower extremity strain
4. Scheduled breaks, offering physical activities such as stretching or walking – overall physical and mental wellness
5. Gradual RTW schedules – allowing the employee to recover while working

Written Instructions and clear expectations – mental health and wellness

Cross-training to allow alternating roles to break up repetitive tasks and reduce risks – stress, foot or back conditions

Offer an allowance or discount for appropriate safety footwear – foot or back conditions

Cushioned, anti-fatigue mats – lower extremity and back conditions

Job restructuring to reduce repetitive motions such as twisting, bending, reaching – musculoskeletal conditions

Identify tasks within the workplace that can be performed temporarily by an employee to allow them to stay at work or return sooner – stress, foot or back conditions

Scheduled breaks, offering physical activities such as stretching or walking – overall physical and mental wellness
Healthcare occupations

Assistive devices can be instrumental in lifting, repositioning and transferring patients for healthcare workers!

Promotion of EAP Programs – prevention of burnout and mental health conditions

Employee discounts for health and wellness programs – promoting physical and mental wellness

Gradual RTW schedules – allowing the employee to recover while working

Ergonomic assessment of workstation – musculoskeletal conditions affecting the back/neck or upper extremities

Talk-to-text software – visual impairment, conditions affecting upper extremities

Portable equipment and workstations – musculoskeletal conditions affecting back or neck

Promotion of EAP Programs – prevention of burnout and mental health conditions

Portable equipment and workstations – musculoskeletal conditions affecting back or neck

Adjustable exam tables – musculoskeletal conditions of the back/neck

Cross training when applicable – allowing staff to move easily within the organization

Cushioned or anti-fatigue mats – lower extremity or back conditions

Team-lift or equipment to lift or assist – reducing strain and potential injury

Ergonomic assessment of workstation – musculoskeletal conditions affecting the back/neck or upper extremities

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Regulatory accommodation considerations

Many employers face their own set of challenges when working with regulatory agencies within their field. These agencies enforce strict rules and guidelines for employment eligibility and safety.

- Mental health offerings – overall employee wellness
- Ergonomic seats – conditions affecting the spine or lower extremities
- Offer cross-training to allow employees to perform another role if regulations prevent them from doing their current position (pilot, driver, conductor) – overall employee wellness
- Awareness of regulatory agencies’ impact on employees’ ability to perform their job – regulatory requirements (DOT, FAA, TSA, NTSB, EEOC)
- Hand controls – conditions affecting the lower extremities or back
- Gradual return to work schedules – allowing the employee to recover while working

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Accommodation resources

It is important to remember that you are never alone. There are a lot resources available to assist you in accommodating your employees and making your workplace safe. Here are a few resources to get you started.

- **MetLife’s 18th annual US employee benefit trends study 2020**
  

  Support for Managing Employee Requests and Accommodation Needs under the ADA by MetLife’s ADA Workforce Solutions Team

  Contact your MetLife Representative for more information.

- **Employees’ practical guide to requesting and negotiating reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act**
  
  [https://askjan.org](https://askjan.org)

- **Utilization of data to identify ergonomic opportunities**
  

- **Telework guidance**
  

- **CDC website for researching diseases and conditions**
  
  [https://www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions/index.html)

- **National Alliance on Mental Illness**
  