



HRV Readiness Guide for RTW Planning

**Practical guidance for using
HRV to optimise RTW Plans**



Work Smarter, Recover Smarter: Optimise RTW Planning Using HRV

Rehab Providers and Case Managers are constantly juggling client's RTW goals with the realities of pain, fatigue and other setbacks. That's where Heart Rate Variability (HRV) can help. HRV is a measure of the variation in time between each heartbeat, an indicator of how well the nervous system is managing stress and recovery.

When HRV is high, the body is typically rested, resilient, and ready for action. When HRV is low, it can signal that the system is under strain, even if the client doesn't "look" tired.

This planner is designed to support you in guiding your clients through the ups and downs of recovery, using HRV trends and readiness cues to shape safe, effective return-to-work strategies. Whether your client is recovering from injury, managing chronic fatigue or mental health, this tool helps match their capacity to the demands of the day.



How to Use This Resource

1. Ask clients to check their HRV score or readiness indicators each morning (or reflect on their fatigue, sleep or stress levels),
2. Match the readiness level to the colour zone (Green, Amber, Red).
3. Use the zone to suggest realistic work duties, pacing strategies or recovery actions.
4. Use the tracker to monitor patterns and coach smarter work participation going forward.



High Readiness (Green Zone)

READINESS INDICATORS



- HRV is high for the individual
- Reports feeling rested and energised
- Good sleep and low perceived stress
- Motivated and mentally sharp

RTW FOCUS



- Encourage participation in more demanding work tasks
- Support progress towards pre-injury duties
- Introduce more complex or higher-effort ADLs (Activities of Daily Living)

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES



- Promote increased work hours, duties or physically demanding ADL tasks
- Schedule longer work periods before breaks
- Encourage client to challenge themselves with cognitively demanding or problem-solving tasks
- Attempt previously avoided social, home or recreational activities

NOTES



- Use these days to make gains - physically and cognitively
- Monitor for signs of overreaching
- Ensure workload is aligned with return-to-work goals



Moderate Readiness (Amber Zone)

READINESS INDICATORS



- HRV is in a moderate or declining range
- Mild fatigue or reduced sleep quality
- Client feels "okay" but not fully recovered
- Mild brain fog or distraction

RTW FOCUS



- Promote activity pacing
- Support task rotation or scheduled breaks
- Aim to maintain productivity without risking overload

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES



- Recommend taking postural breaks every 30–45 mins
- Alternate between heavier and lighter work tasks
- Use time-blocking to insert short mindfulness breaks
- Offer flexibility in tasks requiring mental focus

NOTES



- Encourage clients to keep moving and stay engaged
- Reinforce positive momentum through doable tasks
- Use as a teaching moment for pacing and recovery principles



Low Readiness (Red Zone)

READINESS INDICATORS



- HRV is significantly lower than baseline
- Client reports poor sleep, increased pain, high stress or mental exhaustion
- Complains of heaviness, headaches or irritability
- Low motivation, high fatigue

RTW FOCUS



- Prioritise recovery and nervous system regulation
- Reduce task intensity and simplify decision-making
- Advocate for self-care and communication of needs

PRACTICAL ACTIVITIES



- Recommend mindfulness, breathing exercises or short walks
- Suggest requesting help with heavier tasks
- Reschedule non-urgent appointments or deadlines if possible
- Coach them to communicate low capacity with employers or family

NOTES



- Low-readiness days are still valuable
- Focus on nervous system balance, not physical output
- Track what helps and build their personal "low-readiness plan"



Client Response Tracking

Readiness Level: _____

Action Taken: _____

Response: _____

Future Planning: _____

Readiness Level: _____

Action Taken: _____

Response: _____

Future Planning: _____

Readiness Level: _____

Action Taken: _____

Response: _____

Future Planning: _____