



The human face of WorkCover: “I just stayed focused on getting back to work!”

Data entry operator Mandy Coombs says getting support is crucial in recovering from injury and returning to work

When Mandy Coombs first noticed her wrist and arm were sore, she took some Panadol and told herself with a long-weekend's rest coming up, "it'd be alright." But when her arm got progressively worse over the weekend, Mandy decided a trip to the doctor was in order. The diagnosis was tendonitis – a repetitive strain injury.

"The pain went all the way up into my neck," says Mandy, a data-entry operator. "It was excruciatingly painful, and the more time I spent at the computer, the worse it got."

Mandy tried returning to work on reduced duties, but there was no getting away from the fact that most jobs in her workplace required the use of a computer. Eventually, Mandy's doctor told her she needed total rest and ongoing physiotherapy treatment.

By that time, the injury was playing havoc with other areas of her life.

"I couldn't drive or do any domestics, couldn't even hang out the washing, I couldn't carry or lift anything. My boys had to cut up and prepare the meals!" she says. "The depression became quite extreme, as I am used to being an active person – I love to dance, and walk the dog!"

Mandy's doctor told her that she would be eligible for workers compensation. And WorkCover put her in touch with a rehabilitation consultant who, according to Mandy, was "marvelous – she really helped me throughout the recovery process, and in getting back to work."

Mandy's case manager organised for an occupational therapist to assess her work station and make it more ergonomic. His recommendations included Mandy trying more than one type of mouse, so as to vary the muscle structures required.

The case manager, in conjunction with the occupational therapist, also organised a return to work plan for Mandy, and with her doctor's approval, they began a gradual return to work.

Eventually, Mandy returned to work full-time, in a role that currently requires less computer time – where she had been doing full-time data entry, now she does the bookings, so spends more time in varied tasks. Simple changes such as alternating between the different types of mouse made "a huge difference".

"You really need support to get through an experience like this," says Mandy. "I feel blessed to have been so supported throughout – by WorkCover, my case manager and my rehabilitation consultant."

"The most distressing thing about an injury like this is the isolation. An injury that no-one can see, so they don't understand how painful it can be. It's not like an injury where you're cut, and everyone can see the blood."

"I don't give up easily though," she says with a determined laugh. "I knew I'd get back to work it was only time and patience. I've worked since I was 16. I believe for your health and wellbeing it's so much better to be working, so I just remained focused on that!"