



“I couldn’t wait to get back to work,” says new father

Damien Southon’s greatest concern when he injured his elbow at work was being able to provide for his newborn child.

With WorkCover covering his lost wages until he was ready to return to work, he’s happy now to be back on the job – and with both arms working, he can now pick up his baby girl.

It was hot and dry the day he was injured. The fire at Port Lincoln had burnt along the fence-line of the earthmoving company where Damien worked. His employer had a sub-contract with the local CFS to refill their water tankers, and Damien had gone up the road where the fire was burning to refill the tanks. He was climbing back down from a tanker when he hooked his leg on a fire hose, and lost his balance. He fell to the ground, crushing his elbow and grazing his face.

Not realising how badly his elbow was damaged, Damien continued working. “I went to put the truck in reverse, and I couldn’t do it,” he says, realising then something was wrong. He was taken to the hospital, X-rayed, and diagnosed with a fractured left elbow.

“Basically I knocked the top off my radius,” says Damien whose arm was put in a cast.

He was then off work for almost 10 weeks – “I was in plaster for six weeks, and had physio for four.

“The worst thing was that I had a newborn baby, and I couldn’t even pick her up! It was good being able to spend time with the baby, but I was just sitting round at home. I couldn’t do anything. You don’t realise how much you use both arms till one is in a cast.”

Damien couldn’t wait to get back to work. But after he had the cast removed, his doctor still felt he wasn’t ready – he had no strength, and had lost some of his reach.

After four weeks of physio, Damien was cleared to return to work. Initially, his employer was concerned that he wouldn’t have enough suitable alternative duties, as the company’s main work was digging trenches and other sorts of hard manual labour. But pleasingly, Damien’s case manager was able to convince the employer that Damien would benefit from half days doing his previous role, with manual labour assistance from his team members and the support of his supervisor – who happened to be his father.

On his first day back at work, Damien stuck around for the whole day– and every other day since! Initially he did a lot of excavator operating, and a little light digging, but in time he got his strength back, and returned to hard manual labour along with other duties.

“The elbow’s grown back as good as it can now, considering the injury,” says Damien, “although I can’t lock it out, or twist my wrist too much. Also, I might get arthritis down the track, according to the doctor.”

Throughout his time away from work, Damien’s employer stayed in touch on a weekly basis. And although he couldn’t work, Damien was not about to miss out on beers of a Friday. “It was important for me to keep in touch with everyone – so you feel like you’re still part of the team.”

“For me, it was a matter of looking forward throughout the whole experience – and getting my strength back so I could pick up my daughter!”