

“Follow your recovery plan” says worker with hernia

Longtime mechanic and manager Robert Anderson focused on the positive throughout his recovery and return to work

Robert Anderson has worked for 27 years as an automotive technician and manager with Wayne Phillis Ford – physically demanding work that requires a fair bit of heavy lifting. He enjoys this kind of work and was feeling pretty comfortable in his working life.

However in April 2009 he started experiencing pain in his groin area, and noticed a lump. He went to emergency to have it checked out. The doctor suspected a hernia, and the ultrasound revealed he had not one but two inguinal hernias – one on each side of his groin. He was referred to a surgeon, and was scheduled to have surgery in a month’s time.

Around the same time, he was also diagnosed with subacromial bursitis in his left shoulder.

He went back to work on restricted duties until the surgery – no lifting of any objects larger than 2.5 kilos, and no repetitive work with his left shoulder. Despite the restrictions, and the pain he was in, Robert was determined to remain positive – an attitude that no doubt helped his recovery.

Robert had surgery at the end of May, an open mesh repair, then returned home to recover.

“It was boring being at home,” says Robert, whose mother came to “baby sit”.

“I felt trapped,” says Robert. “I couldn’t get in and out of the chair. You learn to compensate, rolling in and out of bed, and such. I watched a lot of DVDs!”

He also says family and work colleagues helped out a lot. “My kids came around, and my ex dropped in to help out. And the guys from work were a good support. They’d come around and take me out for tea.

After a couple of weeks, Robert’s wounds seemed to be healing nicely. “I’m fairly fit and healthy, so recovery-wise, I think that helps,” says Robert.

Robert started to look forward to returning to work in mid-June. However, around that time he began to suspect something wasn’t quite right. He went back to the doctor and was told that an infection had set in. He was readmitted to hospital, to have his wound drained. In the end, he had the infection cut out, and was put on an IV drip of antibiotics for 24 hours.

When he was sent home, a district nurse visited every day to dress the open wound.

Despite the setback, which doctors said would probably put back his return to work by two weeks, Robert continued to remain positive.

“I’m a bit of a workaholic, but it’s important to do as you’re told, I think,” says Robert. “I just don’t like sitting around – I tend to think about all the things I could be doing if I was OK! It’s tempting to push yourself, but I followed the recovery plan [prepared by his Employers Mutual case manager and based on medical advice], and it all went smoothly, except for the infection, which couldn’t be helped.”

He also did the exercises he had been given for his left shoulder religiously.

On 29 June 2009, Robert returned to work on light duties. As foreman of his workplace, “it’s easy to be pretty flexible in my role”. He did desk duties for a couple of weeks, until he was cleared to perform his pre-injury duties again on 21 July 2009. This was only five days later than the original date for his complete return to work – despite the infection!

Robert’s workers compensation case manager Lindy Williams says that he is “without a doubt the most positive worker I’ve been in contact with”, and that “his drive to return to work is inspiring”.

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