

## INFORMATION/EDUCATION PAGE

### Individual Placement and Support Helps People With Spinal Cord Injury Find and Keep Jobs They Want

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#### Why employment is important

Most people want to work because they want to feel productive, earn money, and build social connections. When you are learning to live with a disability like spinal cord injury (SCI), employment is key to rebuilding your life. Working helps you to live longer and makes your life more meaningful and satisfying (fig 1).<sup>1-5</sup>

#### SCI and employment

You may face unique barriers to returning to work. Remember, though, everyone has strengths and limitations. That's why individual placement and support (IPS) uses a "strengths-based" approach. The goal is to find a job based on your strengths, interests, and preferences for work in your community. A good starting point is thinking about your dream job, your hobbies, your past work experiences, and your goals.

"IPS has changed my life. I love getting up in the mornings and I look forward to going to work."  
— Man in mid 50s with spinal cord injury



**Fig 1** Benefits of working according to persons with spinal cord injury.<sup>5,6</sup>

## What is IPS?

IPS is the evidence-based practice of supported employment that helps people find jobs based on their interests. Whether you just completed your rehabilitation after a new injury or have been living with SCI for years, IPS can help you find and keep the kind of work you want now.

With IPS, an employment specialist (ES) works with both your health care team and employers to help you achieve your employment goals. For example, an occupational therapist can help with workplace accommodations such as wheelchair modifications or adaptive devices. Working together, you, your ES, and your health care team find creative solutions to overcome barriers to employment.

### IPS Is a Type of Supported Employment

In some places, IPS is known by other names, most commonly "supported employment." Ask if the program in your area uses the IPS evidence-based approach to supported employment.

## IPS works for persons with SCI

There is solid evidence that IPS helps people with SCI get jobs they want.<sup>7-9</sup> We know that IPS works 2.5 times better than traditional vocational rehabilitation in SCI,<sup>7</sup> and, most excitingly, IPS can help people, regardless of the severity or extent of their injury.<sup>7-9</sup>



### Your preferences matter

An employment specialist will help you look for a job that matches your interests and can assist you in negotiating with employers about adapting job duties or environmental obstacles.



### Rapid job search

You can begin looking for a job right away. Support is provided for obstacles included those related to your SCI.



### Meet employers

Your employment specialist may invite you to tour a potential workplace or meet with different employers to discuss job opportunities.



### Ongoing support

Once you are hired, an employment specialist will stay connected with you to help you keep your job or change to a better job depending on your circumstances.

## What to expect

The goal of IPS is to help you find meaningful work that pays a fair wage with the same opportunities for advancement and participation as other employees. You can expect your ES to help you get out in the community to explore careers based on your preferences. The ES will also support you after you get the job (fig 2).

## Frequently asked questions

- **Will working affect my benefits?** Many people are surprised to learn that they can work without losing disability or health benefits. Because each person's situation is unique, your ES can connect you to a benefits counselor to help you understand how working affects your benefits. Benefits counseling can answer common questions like "How will part-time vs full-time work affect my benefits?"
- **What if I'm worried about returning to work?** It is normal to feel anxious about starting a job. With IPS, you decide how quickly or slowly to pursue a job.
- **Do I have to work 40 hours per week?** You decide on a work schedule. It could range from a few hours per week to full time. The ES will target the type of job that fits your preferred schedule.
- **What if I fail or quit?** Most people have quit or lost a job at some point. This is not a failure.

Fig 2 What to expect while working with an employment specialist during individual placement and support.

Every job is a success because it's a learning opportunity. The ES helps you learn from every work experience what type of job works best for you.

- **What if I've never worked before?** All the same principles of exploring interests and preferences are used whether you have work experience or not.
- **Does IPS guarantee I'll find a job?** No, but it really increases the odds. IPS won't just place you in any job. An ES will work hard to help you find the best job for you in the work force.

"Ever since I started working, my quality of life has been 200% better."

—Man in early 60s with spinal cord injury

### How do I find IPS supported employment services?

Anyone can contact their state's Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, available at <https://askearn.org/state-vocational-rehabilitation-agencies/> to find out about available IPS supported employment services.

Veterans can contact their local VA hospital or clinic for a variety of vocational services, including IPS supported employment. See more information at this website, available at <https://www.va.gov/health/cwt/> Compensated Work Therapy, Veterans Health Administration. You can also ask your VA health care provider to refer you to IPS services.

This Information and Education Page was designed for consumers. Rehabilitation professionals who are interested in learning more about IPS and improving employment services are encouraged to explore *Tools for a Working Life With SCI: Individual Placement and Support in Spinal Cord Injury Toolkit, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, available at <https://www.tampavaref.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2a.-IPS-in-SCI-Toolkit-V2-2020.10.21-WebOpt.pdf>.

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