

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Accommodation and Compliance Series

### Employees with Heart Conditions

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A service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy

## Preface

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a service of the Office of Disability Employment Policy of the U.S. Department of Labor. JAN makes documents available with the understanding that the information be used solely for educational purposes. The information is not intended to be legal or medical advice. If legal or medical advice is needed, appropriate legal or medical services should be contacted.

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Authored by Beth Loy, Ph.D. Updated 12/30/15.

# **JAN'S ACCOMMODATION AND COMPLIANCE SERIES**

## **Introduction**

JAN's Accommodation and Compliance Series is designed to help employers determine effective accommodations and comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Each publication in the series addresses a specific medical condition and provides information about the condition, ADA information, accommodation ideas, and resources for additional information.

The Accommodation and Compliance Series is a starting point in the accommodation process and may not address every situation. Accommodations should be made on a case by case basis, considering each employee's individual limitations and accommodation needs. Employers are encouraged to contact JAN to discuss specific situations in more detail.

For information on assistive technology and other accommodation ideas, visit JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <http://AskJAN.org/soar>.

## **Information about Heart Conditions**

### **How prevalent are heart conditions?**

According to the American Heart Association (2011), millions of Americans have heart conditions, including one in three men and women.

### **What are heart conditions?**

The majority of heart conditions are diagnosed as high blood pressure. Coronary heart disease, congenital heart failure, and stroke are also prominent. Heart valve abnormalities, congestive heart failure, enlarged heart, murmurs, hypertension, marfan syndrome, and rheumatic fever may also contribute to a heart condition. Congenital cardiovascular defects, present in about one percent of live births, may be other causes (American Heart Association, 2011).

### **What are the symptoms of a heart condition?**

Each type of heart condition has its own set of indicators and most symptoms could be caused by other conditions. Also, some heart conditions may have no noticeable effects and may develop differently in women than in men. Women's symptoms may progress over a much longer period of time and also be subtler than men's symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- angina (chest pain sometimes radiating down the left arm or into the jaw);
- sensations of fluttering, thumping, pounding, or racing of the heart (palpitations);
- edema (swelling and fluid retention in the legs, ankles, abdomen, lungs, or heart);

- lightheadedness, weakness, dizziness, or fainting spells;
- breathlessness;
- chronic fatigue; and
- gastric upset (or nausea) (American Heart Association, 2011).

### **What causes heart conditions?**

Men over 45 years old and women over 55 years old, or women who have passed menopause or had their ovaries removed, have a greater chance of being diagnosed with heart conditions. Other increased risk factors for heart conditions include:

- high blood cholesterol/blood pressure,
- physical inactivity,
- excess body weight,
- diabetes,
- coronary artery disease,
- abnormal heartbeat,
- carotid artery damaged by atherosclerosis,
- family history of having a close blood relative who had a heart attack or stroke before age 55 (if father or brother) or before age 65 (if mother or sister),
- smoking, excessive drinking, drug abuse, and poor diet (American Heart Association, 2011).

### **How are heart conditions treated?**

Depending upon what type of heart condition an individual has, surgery, drugs, exercise, diet modification, or a transplant may be options (American Heart Association, 2011).

## **Heart Conditions and the Americans with Disabilities Act**

### **Is a heart condition a disability under the ADA?**

The ADA does not contain a list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA has a general definition of disability that each person must meet (EEOC Regulations . . . , 2011). Therefore, some people with heart conditions will have a disability under the ADA and some will not.

A person has a disability if he/she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having an impairment (EEOC Regulations . . . , 2011). For more information about how to determine whether a person has a disability under the ADA, visit <http://AskJAN.org/corner/vol05iss04.htm>.

## **Accommodating Employees with Heart Conditions**

(Note: People with heart conditions may develop some of the limitations discussed below, but seldom develop all of them. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people with heart conditions will need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of the possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist.)

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What limitations is the employee with the heart condition experiencing?
2. How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee's job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
5. Has the employee with the heart condition been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
6. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee with the heart condition to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
7. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training regarding heart conditions?

### **Accommodation Ideas:**

#### Fatigue/Weakness:

- Reduce or eliminate physical exertion
- Schedule periodic rest breaks away from the workstation
- Allow a flexible work schedule and flexible use of leave time
- Allow work from home
- Implement ergonomic workstation design
- Provide a scooter or other mobility aid if walking cannot be reduced
- Provide parking close to the work-site
- Install automatic door openers
- Move workstation close to other work areas, office equipment, and break rooms
- Provide mechanical assists and lifting aids

### Respiratory Difficulties:

- Provide adjustable ventilation
- Keep work environment free from dust, smoke, odor, and fumes
- Implement a "fragrance-free" workplace policy and a "smoke free" building policy
- Avoid temperature extremes
- Use fan/air-conditioner or heater at the workstation
- Redirect air conditioning and heating vents
- Provide adequate exhaust systems to remove fumes from office machines
- Allow individual to wear a respirator mask
- Allow work from home

### Seizure Activity and Blackouts:

- Eliminate the need to use sharp objects
- Eliminate blinking and flickering lights
- Replace fluorescent lighting with full spectrum or natural lighting
- Use computer monitor glare guards, adjust monitor intensity and color, and decrease the cursor speed of the mouse
- Provide protective clothing/equipment
- Modify job tasks requiring fine finger dexterity
- Allow flexible work hours
- Allow periodic rest breaks
- Allow work from home

### Stress:

- Develop strategies to deal with work problems before they arise
- Provide sensitivity training to coworkers
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for support
- Provide information on counseling and employee assistance programs
- Reduce workplace stress

### Temperature Sensitivity:

- Modify work-site temperature
- Modify dress code
- Use fan/air-conditioner or heater at the workstation
- Allow flexible scheduling and flexible use of leave time
- Allow work from home during extremely hot or cold weather
- Maintain the ventilation system
- Redirect air conditioning and heating vents
- Provide an office with separate temperature control

## **Situations and Solutions:**

A locomotive operator with myocardial infarction experienced reduction in stamina exacerbated by working midnight shifts. The employer required that he work only day and afternoon shifts to accommodate his restrictions.

A supervisor with heart disease was limited in the level of physical activity he could exert. The individual was relieved of marginal functions involving manual labor.

A maintenance technician, restricted from working in extreme temperatures, was accommodated with a modified schedule not requiring her to work outside in these conditions.

An assembly line worker with congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease was restricted to sedentary work and no lifting in excess of 15 pounds. The assembly line job, which could not be modified, required both standing and lifting over 15 pounds. The individual was accommodated with a transfer to a sedentary job.

A receiving clerk with a congenital heart defect was limited in her ability to perform strenuous activity. She was accommodated by having merchandise placed in smaller boxes and being provided a height adjustable material lift to help retrieve elevated boxes. The employer also gave her a reserved parking space closer to the building and allowed another employee to fill out her time card, minimizing walking and stair climbing.

An individual, who delivered mail in a high-rise office building had high blood pressure and was limited to no lifting and pushing over 25 pounds. The employer provided the individual with a power cart and compact lifting devices to assist with moving materials.

## **Products:**

There are numerous products that can be used to accommodate people with limitations. JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <http://AskJAN.org/soar> is designed to let users explore various accommodation options. Many product vendor lists are accessible through this system; however, upon request JAN provides these lists and many more that are not available on the Web site. Contact JAN directly if you have specific accommodation situations, are looking for products, need vendor information, or are seeking a referral.

## Resources

### **Job Accommodation Network**

West Virginia University  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
Toll Free: (800)526-7234  
TTY: (877)781-9403  
Fax: (304)293-5407  
jan@AskJAN.org  
<http://AskJAN.org>

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.

### **Office of Disability Employment Policy**

200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room S-1303  
Washington, DC 20210  
Toll Free: (866)633-7365  
TTY: (877)889-5627  
Fax: (202)693-7888  
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/>

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

### **American Heart Association**

7272 Greenville Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75231  
Toll Free: (800)242-8721  
Review.personal.info@heart.org  
<http://www.americanheart.org>

The American Heart Association is dedicated to providing education and information on fighting heart disease and stroke.

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

1600 Clifton Rd NE  
Atlanta, GA 30333  
Toll Free: (800)232-4636  
Direct: (404)498-1515  
cdcinfo@cdc.gov  
<http://www.cdc.gov>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are dedicated to protecting the health and safety of people - at home and abroad, providing credible information to enhance health decisions, and promoting health through strong partnerships.

### **Heart Information Service**

2300 Wilson Boulevard  
Suite 600  
Arlington, VA 22201  
Fax: (703)248-0830  
Phone: (703)302-1040  
<http://www.healthcentral.com/heart-disease/>

HeartInfo is an independent, educational service that provides a wide range of information and services to heart patients and others interested in learning about lowering risk factors.

### **Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada**

222 Queen Street, Suite 1402  
K1P 5V9  
Ottawa, ON  
Direct: (613)569-4361  
Fax: (613)569-3278  
<http://www.heartandstroke.com>

The mission of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada is to further the study, prevention, and reduction of disability and death from heart disease and stroke through research, education, and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

### **InterAmerican Heart Foundation**

7272 Greenville Ave  
Dallas, TX 75231-4596  
iahf@interamericanheart.org  
<http://www.interamericanheart.org>

The InterAmerican Heart Foundation is dedicated to reducing disability and death from cardiovascular diseases and stroke in the Americas.

### **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**

NHLBI Health Information Center  
Attention: Website  
P.O. Box 30105  
Bethesda, MD 20824-0105  
Direct: (301)592-8573  
Fax: (240)629-3246  
nhlbiinfo@nhlbi.nih.gov  
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) provides leadership for a national program in diseases of the heart, blood vessels, lung, and blood.

**National Organization for Rare Disorders**

55 Kenosia Avenue  
Danbury, CT 06813-1968  
Toll Free: (800)999-6673  
Direct: (203)744-0100  
Fax: (203)798-2291  
<http://www.rarediseases.org/>

NORD is a unique federation of voluntary health organizations dedicated to helping people with rare "orphan" diseases and assisting the organizations that serve them. NORD is committed to the identification, treatment, and cure of rare disorders through programs of education, advocacy, research, and service.

## References

American Heart Association. (2011). *Heart disease and stroke statistics — 2012 update*.

Retrieved December 28, 2011, from

[http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/General/Heart-and-Stroke-Association-](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/General/Heart-and-Stroke-Association-Statistics_UCM_319064_SubHomePage.jsp)

[Statistics\\_UCM\\_319064\\_SubHomePage.jsp](http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/General/Heart-and-Stroke-Association-Statistics_UCM_319064_SubHomePage.jsp)

EEOC Regulations To Implement the Equal Employment Provisions of the Americans

With Disabilities Act, as Amended, 29 C.F.R. § 1630 (2011).

This document was developed by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN). Preparation of this item was funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, Grant Number OD-23442-12-75-4-54. This document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.