

What to Expect After a Work Injury in Rhode Island

Workers' Compensation Recovery Timeline, Common Symptoms, Self-Care Guidance, Reporting Basics, and Treatment Considerations

Mark Mulak, DC, MBA, MS, DACBSP®, DACRB, DAIPM, RMSK®, ICSC

Cityside Chiropractic

Providence | Cranston, Rhode Island

citysidechiropractic.com

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This guide is provided solely for general educational and informational purposes. It is not medical advice, legal advice, an offer of treatment, a guarantee of outcome, or a substitute for an in-person evaluation by a qualified healthcare professional. Reading or downloading this guide does not create a doctor-patient relationship. A provider-patient relationship is established only after proper intake, consent, examination, and acceptance by the practice. Workers' compensation cases vary significantly. Symptoms, recovery timelines, work restrictions, and claim outcomes depend on many individual factors. The information in this guide represents general observations only and should not be used to predict any specific case. If you have an emergency, call 911 or seek immediate medical care.

INTRODUCTION

If you were recently injured at work in Rhode Island, you likely have many questions: How do I report the injury? What symptoms are commonly reported? How long might recovery take? What should I expect with workers' compensation? This guide provides clear, practical information to help you understand the recovery process and navigate the early stages after a workplace injury.

COMMON TYPES OF WORK INJURIES IN RHODE ISLAND

Work injuries can occur suddenly — such as slips, falls, or lifting incidents — or develop gradually through repetitive stress. Common examples may include:

- Low back strain or sprain
- Neck and shoulder injuries
- Knee, wrist, or ankle injuries
- Repetitive motion conditions
- Aggravation of pre-existing conditions

Proper evaluation is required to better understand the nature and extent of any injury.

WHAT TO DO IMMEDIATELY AFTER A WORK INJURY

- Report the injury to your supervisor or employer's workers' compensation representative as soon as possible.
- Seek medical evaluation if symptoms are significant or interfering with your ability to function.
- Document the incident — including the date, time, location, mechanism of injury, and any witnesses.
- Keep records of all medical visits, communications, and work status notes.

In Rhode Island, the employer typically reports the injury to its workers' compensation insurance carrier or claim administrator, which then reports electronically to the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training.

RED FLAG SYMPTOMS — SEEK IMMEDIATE CARE

Go to the ER or call 911 if you experience:

- Loss of consciousness
- Severe or worsening headache
- Chest pain or difficulty breathing
- Significant weakness, numbness, or loss of coordination
- Seizures
- Repeated vomiting
- Severe neck pain with neurological symptoms

WHY SOME SYMPTOMS APPEAR LATER

Some work injuries become more noticeable hours or days later due to inflammation, muscle guarding, or continued activity. Delayed symptoms do not necessarily indicate a minor or severe injury by themselves — but they do warrant proper evaluation when they persist, worsen, or interfere with normal activity.

COMMON SYMPTOMS AFTER A WORK INJURY

Commonly reported symptoms after a work injury may include:

- Neck or back pain and stiffness
- Shoulder, knee, wrist, or ankle pain
- Headaches
- Muscle spasms
- Radiating pain, numbness, or tingling
- Increased pain with specific movements or positions

These symptoms are non-specific and should be interpreted in the context of an appropriate history and examination.

TYPICAL RECOVERY PATTERNS

Recovery after a work injury is often not linear and varies considerably between individuals.

Early Phase — First 1 to 2 Weeks

Pain, stiffness, swelling, and fatigue are often more noticeable. Some people report that symptoms become more apparent after the first 24 to 72 hours.

Intermediate Phase — Weeks 3 to 6

Many people experience gradual improvement in pain and daily function, although flare-ups can still occur with increased activity or work demands.

Longer-Term Phase — Beyond 6 to 12 Weeks

Some injuries improve well, while others require more time, modified duty, additional diagnostic workup, or further care. Progress depends on factors such as injury type, job demands, age, prior injuries, medical history, and consistency of care.

Important: These are general patterns only. Your provider will monitor your progress and adjust the treatment plan based on your examination findings and recovery course.

SELF-CARE CONSIDERATIONS

- Gentle movement and walking as tolerated — avoiding complete bed rest unless specifically advised
- Ice or heat for comfort if either seems helpful
- Attention to sleep posture and workstation ergonomics
- Pacing activities to avoid large swings between overexertion and inactivity
- Good hydration and nutrition

Always check with your treating provider before starting new activities.

WORK RESTRICTIONS AND RETURN TO WORK

Return-to-work decisions should be individualized based on examination findings, job demands, and functional tolerance. Modified duty is often considered during recovery and may be helpful in some cases. Restrictions can and should be updated as your condition changes.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR TREATMENT PLAN

Treatment should be tailored to your specific injury, job requirements, and response to care. A sound plan includes regular re-evaluations and clear communication about progress and goals. The goal is to support recovery of function as safely and appropriately as possible.

Maximum Medical Improvement (MMI) generally refers to the point where further significant gains from treatment are no longer expected. The timing of MMI varies widely from person to person.

At Cityside Chiropractic, work injury evaluation uses the same objective testing suite applied to motor vehicle accident patients — including orthopedic and neurological examination, PostureRay CRMA radiographic mensuration when cervical instability is suspected, RightEye and BTrackS assessment when head injury or vestibular involvement is present, and RMSK-credentialed musculoskeletal ultrasound for soft tissue visualization.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How soon should I report a work injury?

Report it to your employer as soon as possible.

Who files the official claim?

In Rhode Island, the employer typically reports the injury to its insurance carrier or claim administrator, which then reports electronically to the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training.

Can I choose my own doctor?

In Rhode Island, an injured worker generally has the initial freedom to choose a qualified healthcare provider for diagnosis and treatment. Later changes in treating providers may involve additional rules — confirm the current process with the claim administrator or a qualified attorney if questions arise.

Will chiropractic care be covered?

In some Rhode Island workers' compensation cases, chiropractic care may be covered when it is considered medically appropriate for the work-related injury. Coverage, authorization, and duration of care depend on the facts of the claim and the applicable review process.

What is Maximum Medical Improvement (MMI) in workers' comp?

It generally refers to the point at which your condition has stabilized and further significant recovery is not expected with continued treatment.

Does good documentation guarantee a smooth claim?

Thorough documentation may help support your care, but it does not guarantee claim approval or any specific outcome.

Can I have both a workers' compensation claim and a personal injury claim?

In some cases — yes. If your work injury was caused by a third party (for example, a car accident while driving for work, or a defective piece of equipment), you may have both a WC claim and a separate personal injury claim simultaneously. A Rhode Island attorney who handles both WC and PI cases can advise you on your specific situation.

ABOUT DR. MARK MULAK

Dr. Mark Mulak, DC, MBA, MS, DACBSP®, DACRB, DAIPM, RMSK®, ICSC has more than 20 years of experience evaluating and managing work-related and motor vehicle accident musculoskeletal injuries in Rhode Island. His advanced certifications include Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians (DACBSP®), Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Rehabilitation Board (DACRB), Diplomate in Integrative Pain Management (DAIPM), Registered Musculoskeletal Sonography specialist (RMSK®), and International Certified Chiropractic Sports Clinician (ICSC). Dr. Mulak is Expert Witness Qualified through Cleveland University, serves as Rhode Island's ACA State Delegate, and is the author of *The Objective Injury Model: A Plaintiff Attorney's Guide to Objective Documentation in Motor Vehicle Injury Cases*. At Cityside Chiropractic, the focus is on careful clinical assessment, objective documentation, patient education, and appropriate referral when needed.

CITYSIDE CHIROPRACTIC

Providence: 480 Broadway, Providence, RI 02909

Cranston: 900 Reservoir Avenue, Cranston, RI 02910

Phone: (401) 272-5710

Website: citysidechiropractic.com

Languages: Se habla español

Hours: Monday – Friday: 8:30 AM – 6:00 PM | Saturday: 8:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Same-day appointments available. No referral required. Lien basis — no out-of-pocket cost for workers' compensation patients.

FULL DISCLAIMER

This guide is intended only as general educational material for public distribution. It is not intended to diagnose any condition, render an opinion in any specific legal or insurance matter, establish a standard of care for every circumstance, or replace individualized professional judgment by a qualified healthcare provider. No statement in this guide should be construed as an admission, representation, warranty, guarantee, or promise regarding clinical outcome, length of treatment, work status, disability, impairment, permanency, causation, reasonableness of care, necessity of care, insurance reimbursement, or the success of any workers' compensation claim. Reporting requirements, benefits, and procedures may change, and individual cases may involve deadlines, forms, or disputes beyond the scope of this guide. For official Rhode Island workers' compensation information, readers should consult the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training. Individuals with emergency symptoms should seek emergency medical attention immediately. If there is concern for a medical emergency, call 911 or seek immediate emergency evaluation. © 2025 Cityside Chiropractic. All rights reserved. citysidechiropractic.com