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FLEXIBILITY

Finding a job with flexibility is important for vestibular patients who may find typical work hours and environments triggering.

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Job Hunting With A Vestibular Condition

By Karen R Mizrach

Working is a part of life that contributes to our sense of well-being and importance, not to mention allows us to pay the bills. When a health challenge threatens our ability to work, we can face negative economic, mental health, and social consequences. Luckily we live in a society where disability does not have to be a barrier to work.

If you decide to enter or reenter the work world, the job hunt will be different from the last time you embarked on this journey. Your priority will be your well-being, and your vestibular symptoms will guide many of your decisions as you job hunt. Ultimately you can find a place that feels rewarding and safe.

Hannah Olsen of **Chronically Capable**, a company born out of her own personal struggle, believes that those of us with chronic health challenges have a lot to offer the workforce. We are adaptable, resilient, and determined.

WHAT KIND OF WORK?

As always, a job hunt begins with an honest self-examination. Looking for a job with a chronic disorder requires that you ask a few more questions of yourself.

- What are my interests?
- What are my skills?
- What are my qualifications?
- What are my strengths?
- What are my new limitations?
- What kind of environment would be best?
- Work from home or in an office?

Your task will be to find work that blends your health needs with your job goals. It will be a balancing act (pun intended!)

If you're unsure of what kind of work you want to do or are considering a career change, a good beginning point is to explore careers and jobs that are "friendly" options for people with disabilities. **This blog entry**, from NovoResume, has a long list of possibilities, as well as pointers for the process of job hunting. Taking an interest or skills inventory can be helpful; **this article** about those assessments is a good resource. As you work through the process of choosing a job type or career path, keep your



health issues in mind—not because they will limit options, but because you will make smarter choices.

WHAT ENVIRONMENT?

Picture what type of environment will allow you to work comfortably. By now you know your symptoms and triggers, so note what issues could arise in the workplace. A hectic, noisy setting may be unrealistic now. Being on your feet all day could be difficult. A typical 9-5 schedule may not be possible anymore. Long or complicated commutes probably would be energy-zapping. Flexibility will be important. It's think-outside-the-box time. Identify what daily routine, environmental considerations, and location will be ideal. Make your priority list and try to fulfill at least the top two or three.

One trend that has been growing, even before COVID-19, is that of working remotely. Many jobs allow you to station yourself in a familiar, safe, and controllable environment. These jobs offer some flexibility and choice others may not. **8 More Ways to Make Money from Home with a Chronic Illness** offers some creative ideas for working from home.

As you evaluate jobs and workplaces, also plan solutions to possible triggers. For example; annoying lighting can often be replaced. Earplugs can help with noise. FL-41 lenses can help with a lot of screen time. Taking healthy snacks and water can keep you from getting depleted. Even a comfortable chair or spot in your work area for a quick nap could be a huge plus. In the past, your work environment may have been something you never even noticed. Now it will be a top priority and key to your success. Set up your space to work for you!

WHERE TO LOOK?

Once you've identified job types that are appealing and realistic, it's time to begin the search. Now is the time to use any contacts or prior connections. Let friends, family, former colleagues, and neighbors know you're looking. If you can picture yourself working in a place you're already familiar with, investigate possibilities there. Check the website and maybe drop by to ask if they are hiring.

It's often wise to visit potential workplaces before applying. Is it quiet enough? Is it easy to move around the area? Is the parking convenient? Take yourself on a few "field trips."

Look for companies with good reputations for inclusiveness, flexible schedules, and convenience

to your location. Keep in mind that a long commute may cause problems for your health and trigger symptoms before you even get to work.

If you want to work from home, narrow your search to positions that can be done remotely. It will be easy to identify this option using the top job search sites. **FlexJobs** is one site that lists positions with more flexible possibilities. Other popular sites that can filter remote positions are **Indeed**, **Glassdoor**, and **LinkedIn**. **Finding a job with a Chronic Illness**, posted on the **Mind Over Meniere's** site, has some great links to job search sites, as well as ideas for the job search.



APPLYING AND INTERVIEWING

In many ways, this part of the process is the same for everyone, Vestie or not. Polish up your resume, apply for jobs, anticipate interview questions, and have an appropriate outfit ready to go. On the surface, these elements of the job search are the same; on a deeper level, keep your health needs in mind and assess each job in terms of those needs.

Interviews can be nerve-wracking regardless, but even more so for those with health challenges. When you are asked to interview, especially an on-site interview, here are a few extra tips. Pace yourself that day; rushing in at the last minute is a guarantee for stress. With a balance disorder, it will be important to wear shoes you can walk in, and not to carry too many things. If you need to use a cane, do so; you don't need to explain any aids. Use any tools you have for coping in potentially stressful situations—deep breathing, positive self-talk, reviewing goals, and staying focused on the prize: employment that is both satisfying and comfortable, where you will be more than your illness, while it will also be respected.



Once you are in an interview, be yourself and try to relax. You do not need to disclose your health condition and should stay away from that topic. Remember, your vestibular disorder is not a weakness or disqualifier; it is part of you that you will consider when evaluating a position. Don't forget to ask about work hours, opportunities to work from home, flex options, and other features that may make the position more adaptable to your needs. Obviously, some of these questions can wait until you decide you like the position or are offered the position. It's important not to express too many needs immediately, but keep them in your mind.

If it seems appropriate, you might ask for a walk-through of where you would be working. Observe the environment and ask yourself—would I be comfortable or miserable here? Determine if accommodations would be realistic in terms of lighting, noise, amount of walking/movement. If there are cubicles, are you able to work in a small space? Does this seem doable or overwhelming?

Remember, job hunting is not only about them wanting you. It's also about finding the right environment in which you can thrive. You will evaluate a position based on your professional goals, but also your need to find a place you can handle day after day. It's completely doable with a bit of strategizing, a good dose of self-awareness, and confidence. You've got this!

FURTHER RESOURCES:

- Chronically Capable (wearecapable.com)
- The Surprising Truth About Chronic Illness And The Future Of Work (bit.ly/forbes-work)
- Disability Career Guide (bit.ly/disability-cg)
- I Manage a Chronic Illness and a Thriving Career—Here's How (bit.ly/contessa-career)

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