What are non-visible disabilities?

Of the 18.3 million working age individuals with disabilities, many have impairments that are not readily apparent.

Some of the most prevalent non-visible disabilities include: arthritis, asthma, cancer, diabetes, epilepsy, hearing loss, learning disabilities, low vision, psychiatric disabilities, post traumatic stress disorder, and traumatic brain injury.

"People with noticeable and non-visible disabilities don't perform any differently than people without disabilities. What we have done at Ernst & Young is make whatever reasonable adjustment or accommodation necessary in order to make our employees successful in their jobs."

— Lori Golden, Inclusiveness Consultant
AccessAbilities Leader of Ernst & Young

EARN

Employer Assistance and Resource Network

www.AskEARN.org
1-855-AskEARN
(855-275-3276, Voice/TTY)

Confidential, no-cost consultation, customized training and resources to support the employment and inclusion of workers with disabilities.

The National Technical Assistance, Policy, and Research Center for Employers on Employment of People with Disabilities is funded by a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy to Cornell University.

Non-Visible Disabilities in the Workplace

EARN HAS THE ANSWERS!

Ask the Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN) what you need to know about employing, advancing, and retaining individuals with non-visible disabilities.

Are there individuals with disabilities on staff?

Chances are that you have quite a few employees with disabilities of whom you are unaware. This may include individuals with non-visible disabilities, veterans, and mature workers. Some have been with your company for a while and may have sustained an injury or illness. Since most disabilities are non-apparent, many people are not necessarily aware that their friends, colleagues, clients or neighbors have them.

As Bob Foley, a Raytheon corporate human resources manager and retired combat Marine, explains, "Fear of doing something different may lead to procrastination, but if companies educate themselves on how different employees can contribute, then they can build on those successes. It's a matter of looking at the ability and skill set required by the position, reaching out to the appropriate individual and determining the best method to achieve success together."

Does an employee have to disclose a disability?

Disclosure of a disability is voluntary and is referred to as self-identification. It is at the discretion of the employee and may be related to the need for an accommodation or a workplace or performance issue. Some people with non-visible disabilities prefer not to discuss their disability.

Who is responsible for requesting an accommodation?

Individual employees are responsible for requesting reasonable accommodations. This is especially appropriate when the employee has a non-visible disability that the employer is not aware of. Employers often make accommodations without realizing it, such as flexible scheduling, telecommuting, assistive technology, and ergonomic chairs and workstations.

What are the best practices to ensure all individuals with disabilities, including those with non-visible impairments, are successful in the workplace?

- Create a welcoming workplace culture for all employees
- Secure top management commitment and support
- Establish effective communication channels
- Institute mentoring and internship programs
- Provide disability awareness and etiquette training
- Develop a reasonable accommodation policy and procedure
- Establish disability-related Employee Resource Groups