Systemedic
Workers' Compensation Experts

Systemedic MCO - Arkansas Workers' Compensation Training Guide
End of the Healing Period

Purpose

This training document explains how Arkansas workers' compensation law defines and applies the concept of the "end of the healing period." It is designed for adjusters, case managers, utilization review staff, and claims professionals.

1. Definition of the Healing Period

Under Arkansas workers' compensation law, the healing period is the period for healing of an injury resulting from an accident. The healing period ends when the employee is as far restored as the permanent character of the injury will permit.

Key points:

- The healing period continues while active medical treatment is administered with the goal of improvement.
- It ends when the underlying condition becomes stable and no further treatment will improve the injury.
- Continued pain alone does not extend the healing period.

2. Legal Authority

The concept of the healing period is derived from Arkansas case law interpreting Ark. Code Ann. § 11-9-102 and § 11-9-521.

The Arkansas Workers' Compensation Commission (AWCC) relies heavily on medical evidence when determining whether the healing period has ended.

3. Medical Indicators the Healing Period Has Ended

The healing period is generally considered ended when one or more of the following occur:

The treating physician declares Maximum Medical Improvement (MMI).

- Treatment shifts from curative to maintenance or palliative care.
- No additional diagnostic testing or procedures are reasonably expected to improve function.
- Permanent work restrictions are issued.

Important: MMI and the end of the healing period usually occur at the same time, but terminology may differ between providers.

4. What Does NOT Extend the Healing Period

The following do not, by themselves, extend the healing period:

- Chronic pain without objective change
- Ongoing medication management for symptom control
- Home exercise programs without documented improvement
- Periodic follow-up visits without treatment change

5. Effect on Benefits

Temporary Total Disability (TTD):

- TTD benefits generally end when the healing period ends or the employee returns to work, whichever occurs first.

Temporary Partial Disability (TPD):

- TPD benefits may apply during the healing period if the employee is working with restrictions.

Permanent Disability:

- Permanent impairment ratings and Permanent Partial Disability (PPD) benefits are not determined until after the healing period ends.

6. Role of Medical Opinions

- The treating physician's opinion is given significant weight.

- Independent medical evaluations (IMEs) may be used to resolve disputes.
- Objective findings are critical when the end of the healing period is contested.

7. Common Disputes

Disputes frequently arise regarding:

- Whether continued treatment is curative or palliative
- Conflicting medical opinions on MMI
- Requests for additional treatment after MMI
- Entitlement to ongoing TTD benefits

In these cases, the AWCC evaluates credibility, medical evidence, and consistency with statutory standards.

8. Practical Tips for Claims Handling

- Always document the first MMI date in the claim file.
- Review treatment plans to confirm whether improvement is expected.
- Clarify ambiguous physician statements regarding MMI.
- Coordinate benefit changes promptly once the healing period ends.
- Anticipate disputes when significant benefits terminate.

9. Summary

The end of the healing period is a critical milestone in Arkansas workers' compensation claims. It marks the transition from temporary to permanent disability considerations and has a direct impact on benefit entitlement. Accurate identification and documentation are essential for compliant and defensible claims handling.