

MANUFACTURING

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TARGET ON SAFETY

Prevent Injury with Ergonomics

Introduction

What is ergonomics and how does it affect us? Ergonomics is the study of the relationship between people, their work and their workplace. Its primary goal is to help the body move in natural ways and reduce stressors that might cause damage and pain.

Musculoskeletal Disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders can develop either suddenly or over time, causing debilitating pain and resulting in lost time and wages at work. The most common pains come from strains in the neck, lower back, shoulders, elbows, wrists, hands and eyes due to one or more of four primary risk factors: awkward postures, excessive force, repetitive motion or contact stress. The way employees lift and move their

bodies is a major contributing factor in various disorders.

Workstation Worries

The way your workstation is set up may determine your risk of developing a musculoskeletal disorder over time. Improper positioning in your workstation can cause various disorders by causing you to reach or strain unnecessarily. If you are constantly bending or twisting to do regular tasks, your risk of developing a disorder is much higher. However, if you pay attention to several basic rules, problems can be avoided.

Warming Up

Moving the body in ways it is not ready to move and using muscle groups that haven't been warmed up for work can be a major cause of pain. There is real value in

practicing basic stretching exercises for our hands, wrists, back and neck to prepare our bodies for work. Begin with your hands and wrists, stretching them thoroughly for the movements typically made at work. Stretch your neck gently from side to side and then from front to back. Stretch your back while sitting in a chair by bending your chin toward your knees.

Ways to Lift

When lifting, first take a good look at the load. If it is too awkward, too big or too heavy, ask for help. On many occasions, workers lift items that are too big for them simply because they are unwilling to ask for help, resulting in unnecessary pain and lost wages. Success at your job means getting assistance when necessary.

Second, lift with your legs, never with your back. Your legs are your biggest muscles and, unlike your back muscles, they are able to lift heavier objects. With a straight back, keep weights at shoulder level. Bending at your waist when you are lifting heavy objects can strain your back muscles, which can lead to pain and musculoskeletal disorders.

Third, avoid lifting and twisting in the same motion. Your first goal is to get the object off the ground. Once your legs are straight, you can move your legs instead of twisting your back.

One final thought on lifting: back belts have not been proven to be an effective injury prevention measure when used alone. The only way to effectively prevent back injury is to follow the correct lifting procedures, with or without a back belt.

Take Breaks

Although there are many ways to avoid musculoskeletal disorders, repetitive motion injuries and other ergonomic-related problems, one of the best ways to prevent pain is to recognize that muscles require periodic rest.

As you work, take regular breaks to stretch and rest your muscles. If you are sitting, stand up and stretch. If you have been working on a detailed task, stop and stretch your hands and wrists. If you have been standing for long

Back Belts and Injury Prevention

Despite differing opinions on the effectiveness of using back belts to prevent injuries, all experts agree on this: back belts should **not** be used in place of proper lifting techniques and procedures.

periods, sit down and stretch your back out again. Switch with a co-worker to change the type of task you work on after a period of time to give one set of muscle groups a rest while using others. A little common sense can go a long way in reducing your risk of pain and lost wages in the long term.

Stay Alert

If you feel the way that your workstation is set up needs to be reviewed, remember to bring this information to your supervisor's attention. The company is very interested in making sure that everyone is able to work without pain. If you have any questions regarding ergonomics or your work area, speak up.