

Ergonomics: Optimizing Employee Health and Performance



Fitting the job environment to you

You should never have to feel like you need to work through pain to get your job done. Following the principles of ergonomics - an applied science that considers people's abilities, limitations, and characteristics in the design and evaluation of work systems - you can reduce stress and eliminate injuries associated with poor posture, overexertion and repeated tasks. The goal of ergonomics is to design systems that preserve the wellbeing of all employees, minimize the risk of injury and illness, especially musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), and maximize system as well as human performance. Whether you're lifting boxes in a warehouse, placing items in an assembly line or typing on a computer, ergonomics is important to everyone.

Improper workstation setup and work design issues can lead to serious MSDs, which are injuries or disorders of the muscles, nerves, tendons, joints, cartilage and spinal discs. If you are experiencing discomfort, look for ways to reduce the following risk factors in your job:

- Overexertion while lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, reaching or stretching
- Repetitive motions
- Working in awkward positions
- Sitting or standing too long in one position
- Using excessive force

Fortunately, with early intervention and improved work and task design, MSDs can be prevented. Here are a few strategies you can use throughout your day to avoid discomfort and prevent injury:

- Take frequent breaks - get up and stretch, walk around or change your scenery
- Vary the workday - if possible, try to space out different types of tasks
- When using a computer, follow the 20-20-20 rule - every 20 minutes, look at something about 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds
- Report pain or discomfort immediately - don't wait until it becomes serious, always inform your supervisor
- If you are a supervisor, be sure to monitor your employees and make sure they are taking necessary breaks

Bring it home

While ergonomics is most commonly thought of as a workplace safety concern, MSDs can also result from activities at home and in communities like playing video games, cooking, sewing or home repair. They can also impact your ability to engage in hobbies you enjoy off the job with your family and friends.

Bring your ergonomic safety knowledge home with you:

- Listen to your body and take breaks when performing strenuous work like snow shoveling or landscaping work
- Set up your home office and gaming computer following proper office ergonomics guidelines
- Wear both straps when using a backpack to carry materials; Consider using a purse that has a strap that can be worn across your body, especially if you carry it for long periods of time
- When removing groceries or other items from the trunk or back of your vehicle, pull them as close as possible to the edge before lifting them
- One-third of the day is spent in bed; make sure your mattress and pillows support good sleeping postures
- Look for ergonomically designed tools - kitchen knives and utensils, gardening tools, rakes, and shovels, and make sure to maintain the handle grips and blades as they wear over time

Don't let an MSD prevent you from doing what you love. Keep these tips in mind for safe work and play.

Fast Stat:

Overexertion and bodily reaction is the leading nonfatal injury event involving days away from work, representing 31% of all such injuries. (Injuryfacts.nsc.org)

