Northwestern
FINANCIAL OPERATIONS
Risk Management

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Preventing Sprains and Strains

Always Keep your Position in Mind

Many companies that voluntarily implement ergonomic programs demonstrate that simple and inexpensive ergonomic interventions, are available to reduce Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), such as strains, sprains and tendonitis. Ergonomics is the science of fitting the task to the person, rather than physically forcing the worker's body to fit the task. MSDs are soft-tissue injuries to muscles, tendons, and ligaments that usually develop gradually. They typically occur in the neck, back, shoulder, elbow, wrist and knee. Some of the factors that cause MSDs are forceful exertion, repetitiveness, awkward postures, environmental stresses, and individual differences. When these factors are present, MSD symptoms such as numbness, swelling, fatigue, discomfort, stiff/tight muscles, tingling, and pain can arise. Once symptoms occur, it is crucial to make modifications to work conditions and practices, so an injury doesn't take place. If symptoms are ignored, they can lead to injuries that require more extensive treatment or permanent disability.

MSDs accounted for 31% of injuries among all workers and required a median of 12 days to recuperate before returning to work according to the 2016 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). This fiscal year alone, 13 Northwestern employees suffered strain, sprain or tendonitis related injuries; and on average, employees missed work or had to perform different tasks for 16 days per injury. The high incidence of MSDs, also affects others in the workplace, as job tasks ordinarily performed by the injured employee are assigned to coworkers or jobs are delayed.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review common ergonomic related injuries in your workplace and discuss how they can be avoided.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe work place, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure!

Applying ergonomics to the workplace will help strike a proper balance between work requirements and staff capabilities, lessening the likelihood of injuries arising. Below are some ways to reduce injuries in the workplace

- Lift with your knees, not your back and avoid making awkward movements
- Rotate tasks with other employees to reduce repetition
- Select the appropriate ergonomic tools to reduce the amount of stress put on your body and maintain neutral wrist positions

- When working overhead, change body positions to avoid awkward postures, relieve muscle tension, and improve circulation
- Stretch throughout the day to prevent your muscle from tightening up and causing an injury
- Practice good housekeeping to prevent slips, trips, and falls
- Protect yourself by wearing the appropriate safety gear, such as knee pads when working on hard surfaces

Some benefits of ergonomics in the workplace include reducing days away from work, improving productivity, improving quality of work and life, and improving employee engagement.

Training is key

Learn more: Complete *Industrial Ergonomics* training at learn.northwestern.edu

Safety at Home

Workplace injuries often take place when fatigue outruns the workers recovery system. Consider these home safety tips to prevent injuries in the workplace:

- ✓ Ensure that you get adequate amount of rest to reduce weariness
- ✓ Make sure you're consuming enough water to eliminate dehydration
- ✓ Do not try and complete a large project by yourself. Ask someone for help to avoid overexertion

For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management at gwen.butler@northwestern.edu for details.