



## Ergonomics

Ergonomic injuries, or musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), accounted for 33% of all work injuries and illnesses in 2011, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The average time away from work it took to recuperate from an MSD was 11 days.

### MSDs Are Linked To:

- Repetitive tasks (frequent reaching, lifting, carrying)
- Overuse of muscles
- Awkward postures
- Forceful exertions (carrying or lifting heavy loads)
- Static posture (maintaining fixed positions when working)

To overcome MSDs, employers may want to consider “designing” the pain out of repeated tasks and aligning workspaces and work stations more closely with an employee’s physical capabilities.

### Common MSD Injuries and Symptoms May Include:

- Tendonitis
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Reduced range of motion
- Loss of strength
- Pain and swelling; numbness and tingling (hands falling asleep)

### Work Station Tips:

- Look for work stations that are designed with spring-leveling carts and elevating tables, to keep objects at waist level for lifting
- Adjust work areas to fit a worker’s height
- Encourage workers to shift positions or get up and stretch periodically
- Use anti-fatigue floor mats

Occupations more likely to see MSD injuries include nursing assistants, and heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers. The most severe MSDs occurred to the shoulder, according to BLS figures. Office workers and those in industrial jobs may suffer chronic strain in their shoulders and necks.

## Steps to Prevent Shoulder and Neck Strain:

- Place a desk worker's telephone closer inside the work zone so they don't have to over reach to pick up the handset.
- Consider installing hands-free head sets for workers who will be required to spend a lot of time on the phone, as squeezing a handset between the ear and shoulder can cause stress and neck pain.
- Encourage workers to stand up occasionally from their desks to move around and stretch.
- For workers in a processing line, be aware of whether tall employees are stooping over or shorter employees are reaching improperly to perform tasks, as both static, focused postures can cause strain and stress.
- For workers who use hand tools, make sure tools are sharp so employees don't have to twist arms, necks and shoulders to complete cutting tasks.

OSHA offers industry-specific guidelines for some trade and professional associations and related organizations. The agency offers a variety of eTools providing Web-based solutions to ergonomic hazards.

Sources: OSHA, NIOSH, BLS

Safety tips developed based on generally accepted safety standards believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is for general guidance only and should not be relied upon for legal compliance purposes.

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