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Ergonomics and Injuries

What do these work sectors have in common: nursing homes, auto production, baggage handling, parcel delivery, computer operators and meat or poultry packing?

They have the highest rates of ergonomics-related injuries, which you also might hear referred to as repetitive stress and repetitive motion injuries.

Ergonomics is the applied science of equipment design and arrangement, intended to maximize productivity by reducing operator fatigue and discomfort. Injuries related to ergonomics are those caused by over-use, impact, vibration, repetition, and forceful exertion. Largely injuries include carpal tunnel syndrome, bursitis, tenosynovitis, tendonitis and others. These problems affect the muscles, ligaments and tendons as well as the nerves and blood vessels.

Ergonomics-related injuries can be reduced by improvements in equipment and work practices. An example is work in a nursing home, where an employee is more likely to be injured than is a worker in a coal mine or steel mill. The most common injury for a nursing home worker is back injury caused by lifting patients. These injuries can be reduced significantly by use of mechanical lifting and transfer devices for moving patients in and out of beds and chairs.

No occupation is exempt from the possibility of ergonomics-related injury. Office jobs can lead to neck, back, wrist and hand injuries caused by repetitive work done in awkward or static postures.

How can you protect yourself against ergonomics-related injury?

- Pay attention to how you do your job. Be aware of long reaches for materials, repetitive motions and twisting movements while carrying an object.
- Arrange your work station for the best placement of tools and supplies. Things you use frequently should be within easy reach. Infrequently-used items should be stored out of your way.
- Use mechanical equipment for lifting and moving items whenever possible. An electrical lift table and a hand cart can save your back relatively straight, while maintaining the natural curves at the neck and lower back.
- Move around while you work in a sitting or standing position. Shift frequently in your chair and use a footrest.

- Make sure that your computer workstation is set up properly, and that you are using your computer safely.
- Stay comfortably warm. When your work environment is cold, wear gloves if you can do so without the risk of getting tangled in moving equipment.
- Lift safely by bending your knees instead of your back.

Give some thought to how you can improve your work station and your work routines to prevent musculoskeletal injuries.

Safety Tip: School is starting again. Be sure and drive safely.

