Ergonomics Meeting Kit

What’s At Stake

THE OBJECTIVE

Ergonomics (i.e., the scientific study of people at work) is to prevent soft tissue injuries and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) caused by sudden or sustained exposure to force, vibration, repetitive motion, and awkward posture. To create an ergonomically sound work environment, ergonomists and industrial hygienists recommend designing tasks, workspaces, controls, displays, tools, lighting, and equipment to fit employee’s physical capabilities and limitations.

What’s the Danger

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF ERGONOMIC INJURIES

Ergonomic problems most commonly arises in a person’s neck, shoulders, back, or extremities. Depending on the condition, common symptoms can include:

- Tingling or numbing
- Dull and aching, sharp and stabbing, or burning pain
- Muscle weakness, decreased grip strength, or cramping
- Loss of coordination
- Decreased range of motion or discomfort
- Coldness or discoloration of the affected area
- Swelling of inflammation
- Joint stiffness
- Visual fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Burning or watery eyes

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

PREVENTION THROUGH ERGONOMICS – THE RISK ANALYSIS

Assessing work-related hazards and minimizing injury risk is a critical part of controlling the cost of work-related injuries, keeping employees healthy, and returning injured employees to work faster. Important elements of an ergonomic process are:

- **Provide Management Support** – A strong commitment by management is critical to the overall success of an ergonomic process. Management should define clear goals and objectives for the ergonomic process, discuss them with their workers, assign responsibilities to designated staff members, and communicate clearly with the workforce.
- **Involve Workers** – A participatory ergonomic approach, where workers are directly involved in worksite assessments, solution development and implementation is the essence of a successful ergonomic process. Workers Can: Identify and provide important information about hazards in their workplaces.
- **Identify Problems** – An important step in the ergonomic process is to identify and assess ergonomic problems in the workplace before they result in CTDs.
- **Encourage Early Reporting of CTD Symptoms –** Early reporting can accelerate the job assessment and improvement process, helping to prevent or reduce the progression of symptoms, the development of serious injuries, and subsequent lost-time claims.
- **Evaluate Progress –** Established evaluation and corrective action procedures are required to periodically assess the effectiveness of the ergonomic process and to ensure its continuous improvement and long-term success. As an ergonomic process is first developing, assessments should include determining whether goals set for the ergonomic process have been met and determining the success of the implemented ergonomic solutions.

DO´S AND DONT´S IN WORKSTATIONS TO AVOID PAIN

DO keep moving. Set an alarm to remind you if you need it! Sitting for long periods wreaks havoc on your spine and circulation. Get up, stretch, MOVE!

DO try to keep your body in a neutral posture, which creates the least strain on your body.

DO keep your desk clear so you're not forcing your body to work awkwardly around clutter.

DO wear a headset if a good portion of your day is spent on the phone.

DO invest in workstation essentials that are ergonomic, and make sure they are adjusted to where you need them.

DON'T keep your monitor too close or too far away, or hunch over a laptop. This can cause eye strain and headaches in addition to neck and back pain.

DON'T use a desk or chair that's not the proper height for your size. Everyone is different; find what works for you.

DON'T cradle your phone between your shoulder and ear.

BEST ERGONOMIC PRACTICES TO WORK WITHOUT PAIN

Make adjustments to your work habits and your work area so you can work comfortably without stress or strain.

- **Back strain–** is a common injury caused by sitting or standing in an incorrect position for extended periods of time. You may be able to prevent back injuries by using a footrest or a multi-position work station where you can either sit or stand. By changing positions frequently, you can ease the strain on back and leg muscles.
- **Neck strain–** can be caused by holding your arms in an incorrect position. The extra stress on the arms and hands will affect the neck muscles as well. For computer users the top of the screen should be at eye level.
- **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome–** is another repetitive strain injury which can permanently disable the hands and wrists. The

major factor with a CTS injury is the hand and wrist positioning. An incorrect height or an awkward bent-wrist position will increase the risk dramatically. Is your work table set at a comfortable height? How about your chair or stool? Do you keep your arms in a “neutral” or level position? Examples of occupations which have a high rate of CTS are carpenters, cashiers and airline reservation agents.

- **Shoulder strain–** is common when your supplies are positioned at an awkward height. Excessive bending, stretching or lifting can put added pressure on the shoulder joint. Can you re-organize your work area to eliminate this strain?
- **Muscle tension–** can be caused by many things including working too long in the same position, and even stress. Do you incorporate some short breaks and stretching exercises into your work day to avoid strain injuries and fatigue? Simple stretching, flexing and strength building exercises can decrease your chances of injury. Warming up with a few exercises before you begin work is also important.

FINAL WORD

In addition to reducing the risk of injury, good ergonomics and a healthy work environment can increase productivity, improve quality, reduce rework, lower employee turnover rates, reduce training costs and improve workplace morale.