

Reducing Worksite Injuries

Workplace injuries are a significant risk for any business, and they can lead to incredibly costly medical bills, lost productivity and increased insurance premiums. You likely have safety protocols to help prevent on-the-job accidents, but another type of injury could be just as costly. Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) are not caused by accidents, but rather from job conditions or tasks that lead to or contribute to the condition. This article discusses WMSDs and includes tactics to address and prevent them in your workplace.

What Is a WMSD?

A musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) is an injury or disorder of the muscles, nerves, tendons, joints, cartilage or spinal discs. Work-related MSDs are conditions in which the work environment and performance of work contribute significantly to the condition, and/or the condition is made worse or persists longer due to work conditions. Examples of workplace conditions that may lead to WMSDs include routine lifting of heavy objects, daily exposure to whole body vibration, routine overhead work, work with the neck in a chronic flexion position (head bent forward) or performing repetitive forceful tasks.

Examples of MSDs are sprains, tears, back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, arthritis and hernia. MSDs are associated with high costs to employers such as absenteeism and lost productivity, as well as increased health care, disability and workers' compensation costs. In addition, many of these conditions are or can become chronic, further escalating the costs to employers.

Workplace Strategies

There are a variety of strategies employers can implement to reduce WMSDs in their workplace. They may not all make sense for your business, but consider the following ideas to help minimize the impact of WMSDs and prevent them altogether.

- **Examine your workplace** and look for ways to reduce the chance of injury. For instance, you may be able to change the way materials, parts and products are transported in order to relieve burden on employees. Also consider altering the layout of workstations to be more ergonomic.

- **Promote healthy lifestyles**, including physical activity and weight management. Improving physical health and maintaining a healthy weight can reduce pain for individuals with arthritis and back problems, and can help employees prevent these and other MSDs.
- **Provide training to management** and workers regarding risks for workplace injuries, including:
 - Training on how to reduce and avoid injuries
 - Training to help management and workers recognize potential workplace risks for MSDs and mitigate those risks
 - Raising awareness of WMSDs among employees and management, as well as educating employees to recognize a potential injury and know when to seek medical evaluation
- **Make administrative changes** as they make sense in your workplace to reduce the risk of injuries. These may include reducing shift length, limiting overtime, scheduling more breaks for rest and recovery, rotating workers through jobs that are physically taxing and instituting pre-shift stretching sessions.
- **Develop policies** that support a corporate culture of good health, safety and injury management, such as:
 - Required use of personal protective equipment (PPE), plus training on how to properly use it
 - Ergonomic workplace initiatives
 - Workplace safety programs
 - Disability management policies
 - Return-to-work programs
- **Encourage early reporting of WMSDs by employees**, and prompt evaluation by health care providers. Many workplaces stress early reporting for injuries, but employees may understand that to mean only sudden injuries, like accidents, slips and falls. Even though WMSDs occur over time, employees should still report them and get evaluated early — employee education can help promote this practice in your workplace.
- **Educate employees** on workers' compensation and disability benefits, including protections and accommodations offered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention