

5 Steps to Help Prevent Ergonomic Injuries



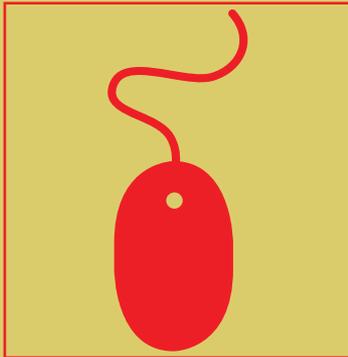
5 Steps to Help Prevent Ergonomic Injuries

Good ergonomic processes are essential to a solid safety program. But improving ergonomics at your workplace may seem like a daunting task. Here are some tried-and-true methods that other safety pros have used to tackle the challenge.

According to OSHA, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are one of the main causes of workplace injuries. Most often, workers get MSDs when their own capabilities don't match the physical requirements of their job. OSHA says these are some likely causes of MSDs among workers:

- using excessive force
- repetition of certain movements that can hurt tendons
- awkward postures or postures that a worker must hold for a long time
- certain types of motion
- compression, like when grasping tools





- not enough recovery time because of overtime work, not taking breaks or not switching up tasks enough
- too much vibration from machinery, and
- cold weather.

You can't afford not to

When it comes to MSDs, prevention is vital. When not addressed, MSDs could cost your company a lot. Take a look at these numbers:

- 34% of lost-workday injuries and illnesses are attributed to MSDs. Companies report almost 600,000 MSDs that result in lost workdays every year
- 1/3 of all workers' compensation is spent on MSDs, which adds up to between \$15 and \$20 billion each year in the U.S.
- Workers with carpal tunnel syndrome require on average 28 days of recovery time -- more needed than someone recovering from a fracture or an amputation, and
- A severe MSD could permanently disable a worker, making it impossible for them to work.

Use the Hierarchy of Hazard Controls

Here are five ways to help reduce ergonomic injuries in your workplace:

1 Use the hierarchy of hazard controls

The Hierarchy of Hazard Controls prioritizes the best ways to protect workers. From most to least effective they are:

- Elimination: Physically remove the hazard
- Substitution: Replace the hazard
- Engineering controls: Isolate people from the hazard
- Administrative controls: Change the way people work, and
- PPE: Protect the worker with safety gear.

One company realized implementing effective ergonomic solutions would require changing engineering controls. So, it put engineers and operations managers in charge of making the necessary changes. By placing these workers at the head of various ergonomics teams, the company was able to stay on top of reaching its goals and reducing its injury rates.

Have employees start on 'Day One'

2. Have employees start on 'Day One'

There's no better way to communicate the importance of ergonomics at work than to address it on an employee's first day.

A company set up a plan that focused on ergonomics from the start. Workers were given an ergonomics assessment when they were hired. Then, they received regular periodic assessments and if they changed desks or if they were feeling any discomfort. The company also added online ergonomics checks to supplement the in-person assessments.

**Remember
one size
doesn't
necessarily
fit all**

3. Remember one size doesn't necessarily fit all

One company realized an ergonomics plan won't necessarily be equally effective for all its workers because their tasks varied from one department to another.

To help everyone achieve effective results, when the company implemented a stretching program, it targeted the body parts that were sustaining the most injuries in each department. By doing this, the company cut its injury rate by 61%.

Regularly encourage worker participation

4. Regularly encourage worker participation

A company asked its workers to take ergonomics assessments regularly, but it soon realized that not as many workers were participating as it would have liked. So, it promoted an inter-departmental competition, using scorecards to show which departments were meeting their assessment goals. This grabbed the attention of managers, who started encouraging their departments to participate.

Put it all together and create an effective program

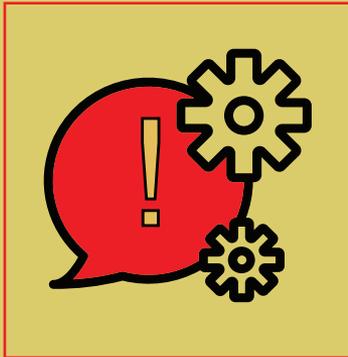
5. Put it all together and create an effective program

OSHA says an effective ergonomic program helps prevent musculoskeletal injuries among workers. A good ergonomics program includes the following elements:

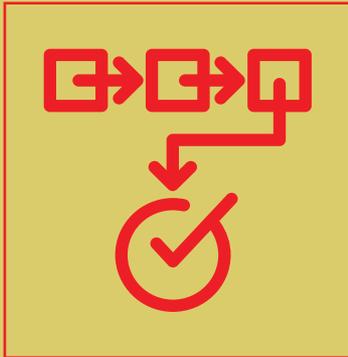
- **Management support:** Managers should communicate effectively with workers, outlining the goals of the ergonomic process
- **Involving workers:** Getting workers involved will help make the ergonomic process much more effective. Have workers participate in assessments and help create solutions to problems
- **Training:** Effective training is key. Teaching workers about the benefits of ergonomics and how to spot

the signs of MSDs will help them take a proactive approach with the process

- Find the problems: Simply identifying ergonomic issues and creating a plan to fix them is important when it comes to preventing MSDs
- Report the symptoms: Encouraging workers to report any signs of MSD symptoms early can help to address ergonomic issues faster. If symptoms are caught earlier, there is less of a chance for serious injuries to develop. Typical symptoms of MSDs can include numbness in fingers or thighs, difficulty moving fingers, stiff joints and back pain. By identifying and reporting these symptoms early, workers can get treatment right away and won't have to miss as much work as they would if the injury was worse
- Find ways to control hazards: Look around and see what the best ergonomic solution is for your workers, and



- Keep track of progress: Evaluate your ergonomic changes regularly to see how effective they are. Review the ergonomic goals you created at the start of the process and see if they've been met. Make changes where needed to ensure that the solutions are effective both in the present and long-term.



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