

Agilus Health & Safety Bulletin

Ergonomics – the key to comfort and safety



Ergonomics is the science of designing work environments to fit the needs of the worker – promoting comfort, safety, and productivity. When properly applied, ergonomic practices can help prevent musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) and repetitive strain injuries (RSIs). Poor ergonomics leads to discomfort, injuries, and long-term health issues, impacting both productivity and quality of life. By implementing ergonomic practices, we can significantly reduce the risk of injury and promote a healthier workplace environment for all employees, no matter where your work setting is.

The Cost of Poor Ergonomics

According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), WMSDs are one of the most common work-related injuries, affecting muscles, tendons, and nerves. In fact, WMSDs account for nearly 40% of all lost time claims in Canada. It's estimated that the direct and indirect costs of poor ergonomics to businesses can be substantial, including lost productivity, increased absenteeism, and healthcare expenses. However, with simple ergonomic adjustments, the risk of injury can be minimized.

Office Ergonomics: Optimize Your Workstation

Working at a desk may seem harmless, but repetitive strain injuries can develop if your workspace is not set up correctly. Here's how to stay safe:

- **Posture Matters:** Research shows that up to 80% of office workers suffer from some form of back pain during their careers. Adjust your chair so your feet are flat on the ground, and your knees are at a 90-degree angle. Keep your back supported by the chair's lumbar support.
- **Screen Position:** Place your monitor at eye level and about an arm's length away to reduce neck and eye strain.
- **Keyboard and Mouse:** Keep them at elbow height, close to your body, and maintain a neutral wrist position. This setup has been shown to decrease the risk of carpal tunnel syndrome.
- **Frequent Breaks:** Studies suggest that taking a break every 30 minutes can help reduce the risks of sitting for long periods, with the added bonus of increasing focus. Use these breaks to stretch, walk around, or change your posture.

Field and Construction Ergonomics: Protecting Your Body on the Move

Field and construction work is physically demanding, which can increase the risk of injuries due to repetitive movements, heavy lifting, and awkward postures. To stay safe on-site, consider these ergonomic recommendations:

- **Lifting Techniques:** The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) notes that improper lifting can account for up to 36% of all workplace injuries. Always bend at the knees, keep your back straight, and lift with your legs to prevent back strain.
- **Tool Selection:** Choosing the right tools can make a difference. Using tools with ergonomic handles reduces strain on the hands and wrists and can lower the risk of injuries like tendonitis.
- **Rotation:** Changing tasks throughout the day helps prevent muscle fatigue and overuse injuries. Employers who implement job rotation practices report up to a 25% decrease in injury rates.

Manufacturing & Warehouse Ergonomics: Improving Safety on the Production Floor

Ergonomics plays a crucial role in manufacturing settings, where repetitive movements, heavy lifting, and long periods of standing are common. Here are some key practices to consider:

- **Workstation Setup:** Adjust workstations to a comfortable height to avoid excessive bending or reaching. Research shows that optimized workstation design can reduce musculoskeletal disorder symptoms by up to 30%.
- **Mechanical Aids:** Using mechanical aids like hoists, conveyors, or carts can help reduce the physical load on your body. According to studies, proper use of lifting aids can reduce back injuries by up to 70%.
- **Proper Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and Posture:** Ensure you wear supportive footwear, gloves, and back braces when necessary to provide added protection and support.



Home Office Ergonomics: Making Remote Work Comfortable

With remote work becoming more common, setting up an ergonomic home office is essential for your comfort and health. While you may not have a designated office space, small changes can make a big difference. Here are some tips to help create a healthier home workspace:

- **Desk and Chair:** If you don't have an office chair, use a cushion to support your lower back and maintain an upright posture. The chair height should allow your feet to rest flat on the ground, with knees at a 90-degree angle.
- **Screen Height:** Place your laptop or monitor at eye level. If you don't have a dedicated monitor stand, use books or a sturdy box to elevate the screen.
- **Keyboard and Mouse:** Use an external keyboard and mouse to avoid hunching over your laptop. Keep them at elbow height and ensure your wrists remain in a neutral position.
- **Breaks:** The flexibility of working from home can encourage longer sitting periods. Set reminders to stand up, stretch, and move around every 30 minutes.
- **Work Zone:** Designate a specific area for work to maintain a boundary between your work and personal life, reducing the likelihood of working in awkward positions (e.g., on the couch or bed).

Universal Ergonomic Practices

Regardless of your work environment, here are some universal ergonomic principles to keep in mind:

- **Stretch Regularly:** Incorporating stretching exercises can increase flexibility, improve posture, and reduce stress on muscles and joints.
- **Monitor Your Environment:** Keep your workspace organized to avoid unnecessary bending, reaching, or twisting.
- **Listen to Your Body:** If you feel pain or discomfort, take action immediately. Ignoring early signs can lead to chronic issues down the line.

Remember, small changes to your workspace or work habits can have a big impact on your health and comfort. Embrace ergonomics to create a safer, more efficient, and healthier work environment!

Don't slump on ergonomics – protect yourself and make it a priority!

Have any questions regarding this bulletin or workplace health & safety?

Contact us at: safety@agilus.ca

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