



Working with Ergonomics

Introduction

What is ergonomics and how does it impact us? Ergonomics is the study of the relationship between you, the work you do and your workplace. There are many activities we perform in wholesale and retail that might lead to pain or musculoskeletal disorders, including standing for most of a shift; lifting heavy or awkward objects; using certain tools; and repeatedly performing the same motion, such as scanning, labelling or pricing. The primary goal of ergonomics is to help the body move in natural ways and reduce stressors that might cause damage. **When we assess our work activities with ergonomics in mind, we can identify tasks that might be putting us at risk.**

Common Musculoskeletal Disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders can affect our muscles, joints, tendons, ligaments, bones, nerves and blood circulation. The most common pains come from strains in the neck, low back, shoulders, elbows, wrists, hands and eyes, but they can also appear in the lower body. This primarily occurs due to one or more risk factors, including awkward postures, excessive force, repetitive motion or contact stress. **Moreover, the way we lift and move our bodies contributes to various disorders.**

Maintaining Flexibility

One of the main contributing factors to strains is beginning to work without properly warming up; do not force your body to move in ways that it is not ready to move. There is real value in practising some basic stretching and strengthening exercises to prepare our bodies for work.

Simple stretching exercises can help avoid problems. Stretch your hands and wrists so they are ready to move in typical ways required at work. Your neck can be stretched gently from side to side and then from front to back. Stretch your back while sitting in a chair by bending your chin towards your knees.

Lifting Techniques

First, when lifting, size up what is going to be lifted and if it is too awkward, too big or too heavy, get help. A successful employee knows when to ask for assistance.

Second, **always lift with your legs instead of your back.** Your legs are your biggest muscles and are designed to lift heavier objects. Use them instead of your back to lift items off the ground. Never bend at your waist when you are lifting heavier objects – it could result in low back pain and musculoskeletal disorders.

Third, **avoid lifting and twisting in the same motion.** Your first goal is to get the object off the ground. Then, once your legs are straight, move your legs instead of twisting your back.

One final thought on lifting – back belts do not allow you to lift extra weight and they may cause more trouble than they are worth if they cause you to ignore proper lifting principles. **Using the correct lifting procedure – not simply strapping on a back belt – is the best way to avoid back injuries when lifting.**

Choosing the Right Shoes

Standing for long periods of time can put you at risk for pain in your feet and joints. **Be sure to wear comfortable, cushioned shoes that grip your heel and support your arch.** Avoid high flats or heels, and make sure the shape of your shoe does not change the shape of your foot (as in pointed toes).





Some Simple Steps to Avoid Stress

Much has been said about redesigning work stations and taking action against cumulative trauma disorders, repetitive motion injuries and other ergonomic problems. One of the best ways to avoid these situations is to recognise that muscles need rest every now and then.

As you work, **periodically take breaks to stretch and rest your muscles.** If you are sitting, stand up and stretch. If you have been working on a computer, with a scanner or with a pricing gun, stop and stretch your hands and wrists. If you have been standing for long periods of time, sit down and stretch your back out again. If you can, change the type of task you work on after a period of time to give one set of muscle groups a rest while using others. Sometimes a little common sense can go a very long way in reducing your risk of pain and lost pay.

Final Thoughts...

When you have work station design issues that need reviewing, remember to bring this information to your supervisor's attention. The company is very interested in providing you with the tools you need to work without pain. If you have any questions regarding your work area, please speak up.