

# TOOLBOX TALK



## DISCUSSION TOPIC: Prevention of Musculoskeletal Injuries

Many of the ways work is done - such as lifting, reaching, or repeating the same movements - may strain the body. Wear and tear on muscles, tissues, ligaments, and joints can injure the neck, shoulders, arms, wrists, legs and back. These injuries are called musculoskeletal injuries or MSI.

MSIs, including strains and back strains, take up to around 69% of the top five injury claims in BC (WorkSafeBC). Demographics of injured workers in 2020.

- 59% of workers injured were male and 41% were female
- The average age of workers injured on the job was 42
- 12% of workers injured were under age 25
- 23% of workers injured were over age 55

### Recognize the Signs

Musculoskeletal injury comes with warning signs and symptoms before an injury occurs, and long before any work is missed. Listen to your workforce. Ensure your managers, supervisors and front-line personnel keep an eye out for things like:

- Comments about discomfort or pain
- Swelling of joints and muscles
- Stretching or rubbing muscles while working
- Self-modifying equipment or workstations
- Quality issues, production bottlenecks, work needing to be re-done
- Repetitive similar injuries with particular tasks
- High turnover or absenteeism

### Hazards

- **Repetitive Motion:** Performing the same sequence of actions for an extended period of time with little or no change in the muscles used (working at your computer)
- **Forceful Exertion:** Performing an action that has the potential to overload the body tissues (carrying a heavy item upstairs)
- **Vibration:** The direct transfer of repeating (back and forth) movements of a machine, or tool, to the body. Vibration can be classified as hand-arm (using a vibrating hand tool for prolonged periods) or whole body vibrations (vibration transmitted through a vehicle cab to the operators' body)
- **Mechanical Compression:** External pressure on the soft tissues, either at high forces and/or for prolonged periods of time (leaning on a barrier; resting a hand, wrist, or elbow on the desk while typing; or tools digging into the hand)
- **Sustained or Awkward Posture/Limitation on Motion or Action:** Work elements (tools, workstations, processes, etc.) that force the worker to adopt body positions

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that increase the stress on the joints or soft tissues of the body (twisting the upper body, and over-reaching)

## Prevention

- Use arm and leg muscles for lifting, do not bend your back
- Warm up before lifting and avoid over-straining
- Do not attempt to lift more than you can carry safely and without undue strain
- Stand close to the load, with feet comfortably apart - about shoulder width
- For a load that is at floor level, squat down, bending at the hips and knees
- Arch your lower back inwards, shoulders back and chest out
- To reduce strain on your back, carry the load close to your body, or on your shoulder
- Avoid sudden jerky movements; move smoothly
- Use mechanical lifts to support and to move heavy loads
- Use carts, rollers or conveyors to support and move materials
- Install or change handles to improve hand and arm posture
- Use cushioned floor matting to reduce fatigue from standing
- Adjust the overall work design to reduce task repetition
- Change tasks to avoid long-term repetitive action
- Protect against excessive heat and cold
- Reduce vibration from tools and equipment
- Promote individual physical fitness through company wellness programs

**Take a walk around your workplace, talk with your team and discuss potential hazards and solutions. Then, start the ball rolling to make improvements. You'll end up with a safer workplace, happier workers, and fewer workplace injuries.**

