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Be an Ergonomics Expert

Ergonomics a word you hear a lot in the workplace these days, and it affects your safety, health, productivity, and comfort on the job. General aches and pains, stiffness, numbness, tingling in the fingers, swelling of joints, weakness, and loss of dexterity are examples of the symptoms associated with ergonomic injuries. Some of the activities or work arrangements which can cause these symptoms include: repetitive work, lifting, reaching, stretching or bending, awkward placement or design of tools, pounding or pushing movements, tool or equipment vibration or maintaining one posture for a long time.

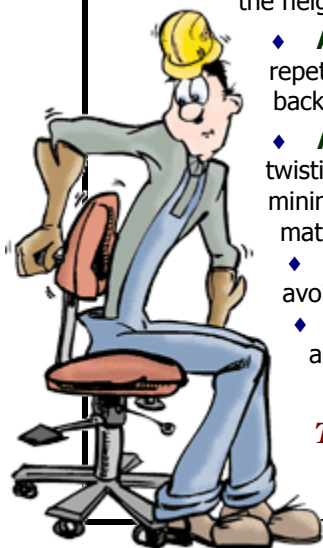
Examine your work area and your work routines for these problems:

- ◆ Tools that do not fit your hands.
- ◆ Awkward work positions, causing you to reach overhead, twist your wrists at an angle or work stooped over.
- ◆ Uncomfortable seating.
- ◆ Work benches and desks at an uncomfortable height.
- ◆ Equipment controls you find hard to reach or read.
- ◆ Inadequate lighting.
- ◆ High noise levels.
- ◆ Equipment vibrating excessively such as poorly designed power tools or poorly maintained vehicles.

Improving Your Individual Work Situation:

You can play an important part in improving your individual work situation to best suit you. You and your supervisor can work together to improve your work environment to help you prevent problems such as back injuries and repetitive strain injuries.

- ◆ **Adjust your work station.** This might mean raising or lowering a chair, changing the level of your work bench or obtaining a platform to stand on. Adjusting the angle of a drafting board or repositioning a computer screen can greatly improve comfort and performance. You can also rearrange lighting to see your work without having to lean forward.
- ◆ **Adjust your chair or stool for comfort.** Use a footrest when sitting in a chair to raise your knees slightly above the height of your hips. When standing, use a footrest so you can vary your position.
- ◆ **Adapt your tools.** Adjustments to tools such as longer, padded, or angled handles can lessen repetitive strain. Avoid handles which cut into the hand. Use tools designed to keep your hands, arms and back in a comfortable, natural position while you are working
- ◆ **Arrange your work.** Lay out materials so that you can reach them without excessive stretching, twisting or bending. If you are assembling materials, arrange them so you can pick them up with a minimum of reaching. Avoid arrangements where you have to lean forward and reach at an angle. Store materials on a shelf rather than on the floor to minimize lifting.
- ◆ **Take a break.** Organize your work to allow you to switch from one task to another. This will help avoid back strain and repetitive strain. Take advantage of scheduled breaks to stretch and move around.
- ◆ **Be aware.** Pay attention to how you feel while you are working. Make adjustments in your work area to prevent strain on your muscles.



The benefits to you of applying ergonomics are improved health, safety, and comfort. Your organization benefits too, with greater productivity.