



About the National Safety Council

The National Safety Council saves lives by preventing injuries and deaths at work, in homes and communities, and on the roads through leadership, research, education and advocacy. Visit us at nsc.org for up-to-date industry news, information and tools to take your safety program to the next level.



Featured Safety Poster

This poster shows employees how to give their office workstation an ergonomic audit and avoid injury.



[Poster: It Doesn't Hurt to Sit Right](#)

Featured Webinar



Visit our [Online Learning Library](#) to view our extensive webinar selection. This month's suggested topic: [Create an Ergonomic Process, Not a Program](#)

Member Benefit Guide



New Edition: [Member Benefits Guide](#)

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Recognize exemplary safety behavior at your organization. Submit applications for the [2016 Safe Driver of the Year](#) and the [Occupational Excellence Achievement Awards](#) today! Learn more [here](#).

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April 2016

Welcome to *Safety Spotlight*, an e-newsletter brought to you by the Department of the Interior Office of Occupational Safety and Health in partnership with the National Safety Council. We hope you will find this monthly newsletter of value. Please send feedback or ideas on topics you would like to see to membershipinfo@nsc.org. Please put "Department of the Interior feedback" in the subject line.

5-Minute Safety Talk: Ergonomics

Ergonomics involves designing and arranging workspaces so people work efficiently and safely.



[This 5-minute Safety Talk](#) explains health conditions that can be caused by ergonomic factors, how to recognize symptoms and how to minimize or eliminate ergonomic risk.

Ergonomics - More than Easing Aches & Pains



What do your employees need to make their jobs easier? Do they complain about pain? Can you improve the bottom line?

These three questions may seem unrelated, but incorporating an ergonomics process into your organization can address all of these issues simultaneously. It starts with listening to employees.

What is Ergonomics?

Ergonomics improves human performance. [OSHA defines it](#) as "the study of work," and "the science of designing the job to fit the worker."

Ergonomics expert [Mark Heidebrecht](#), who spoke at [NSC Congress & Expo](#) in 2013, points to three factors that determine the risk for physical stress and injury in the workplace:

- Risks related to the worker (age, ability, general health)
- Risks associated with the task (repetitive motion, workstation layout, condition of tools)
- Environmental risks (heat or cold, lighting, noise)

Ergonomic Injury is Costly

It's no surprise that the most frequently reported workplace injuries are caused by physical stress. In 2012, overexertion from heavy lifting and similar actions cost more than \$15 billion in workers' compensation costs alone, according to Injury Facts 2016. And seemingly non-stressful actions, like reaching, twisting, bending or kneeling, cost another \$4.3 billion.



The true costs are nearly \$200 billion when you factor in lost productivity, medical costs and days away from work.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 33% of all worker injury cases in 2013 were related to physical stress, and these types of injuries span all industries, from construction to retail sales.

Minimize Injury with an Ergonomic Process

The risk for ergonomic injury depends on the level of effort required for the task, how long the task lasts and how often it is performed. Awkward posture, repetitive motion, contact stress, environmental conditions and force by themselves may not cause injury. But if they occur over a long period of time or require a high level of effort, they can cause harm.

Many ergonomics assessment tools are available - almost as many as there are industries. Here is a [guide to some of them](#) from the American Industrial Hygiene Association Ergonomic Committee.

Even if you don't conduct a formal assessment, it's important to do an ergonomics risk checkup periodically, [like the one found on page 20 of this publication](#), to keep employees operating at peak performance and feeling their best:

- Review injury reports to identify existing problems
- Walk the facility, observe workplace conditions and make note of risk factors
- Notice worker behavior; are they rubbing their shoulders, shaking their arms or hands, or attempting to modify their equipment?
- Listen to workers' ideas on how to improve the process
- Train workers to identify ergonomic problems and gather data; they are the eyes and ears of the process
- Encourage injury reporting
- Let employees know when ergonomic changes are made and why

Many organizational leaders don't associate ergonomics with productivity, but they are inextricably connected, Heidebrecht says. The goal, in addition to reducing injuries, is to reduce fatigue and increase quality, productivity and job satisfaction.

It's Also About the Future

Many people look forward to retirement as a time to travel, play with their grandchildren, garden and enjoy other healthy activities. But if they are in pain from years spent with ergonomic injury, those activities may be physically impossible.



While it may not be possible to eliminate all risk, it's important to take small steps on the road to improving workers' conditions.

Other Resources:

- [Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders in the Workplace](#)
- [Easy Ergonomics: A Practical Approach for Improving the Workplace](#)
- [Computer Workstation Purchasing Guide](#)
- [Musculoskeletal Disorders and Workplace Factors](#)

Ergonomics - Safety Tip Sheet

You should never feel like you have to work through pain to get your job done. If left undetected, ergonomics issues can lead to serious muscle and joint problems. [Learn these ergonomics tips](#) - then bring the knowledge home.

Ergonomics - Safety Checklist

Ergonomics principles don't just apply between the hours of 9 and 5. This [Safety Checklist](#) focuses on two areas that commonly cause pain and strain at home and at work: lifting, and improper desk and chair positioning. Encourage your employees to learn proper techniques so they can apply them to all areas of their lives.