

Is Your Job Hurting You?

Today's jobs present new risks to develop muscle-joint problems. As we age, so do our muscles and joints. Workers are in a variety of jobs located outside, in the factory or office with work loads that are heavy or light but repetitive. Many jobs require sustained posture while performing daily, routine tasks. Other factors may increase our risk of injury on the job such as decreased flexibility, endurance, poor nutrition, tobacco usage, previous injuries and acquired medical conditions. It's no wonder that after working for 15, 20, or 30 years, we may begin to experience various symptoms. One patient recently interviewed reported that she has worked as a receptionist in a busy office for 15 years. "I have headaches and aching in my neck and shoulders almost everyday during and after work. I saw my doctor, who told me to assess the "ergonomics" at my workstation. What does this entail?"

How To Work Smart

Ergonomics is the study of how people interact with their work environment. If you work in an office, it refers to how you "fit" at you workstation. An improper fit can cause strain and fatigue on your spine and the muscles that support your spine. Try addressing the following questions:

1. Can you adjust your seat height?
2. Are your feet firmly on the floor?
3. Are hips at the same level as your knees?
4. Do you have a good lumbar (back) support?
5. Are you arms supported by armrests?
6. Is your keyboard at a height where your wrists are not bent?
7. Are your shoulders relaxed, not "Shrugged" when you use your keyboard?
8. Is the toolbar on your monitor at eye level?
9. Is your computer monitor an arm's length away from you?
10. Do you have a document holder?
11. Do you have a wrist rest or support?
12. Are you able to take short breaks to move out of your working, stationary position?

These are some questions that should help you take a good look at how your body is positioned while you perform your desk job.

Listen To Your Body

Anyone who works hard will go home tired at the end of the day. This is fatigue. After a period of time, this fatigue may become discomfort. Eventually this can get worse, leading to pain and can even become an injury. The result can be back and neck pain, arm

and hand problems such as tendonitis, or chronic headache. You owe it to yourself and your family to learn how to avoid these problems.

Contact a physical therapist to get your workstation assessment and to identify movement impairments. You will be evaluated to assess the personal risk factors that increase your chances of back injury. This will include assessing flexibility, endurance, strength and posture. Ergonomic improvements at work or at home do not have to be expensive and can make the difference in whether you can perform your job without headaches, backaches, and other discomforts.