



# Make Your Job Less Painful

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## FEELING THE PAIN OF YOUR JOB

Do you go home at the end of your workday with aches, pains, strain or tension? If your answer is yes, you're not alone. Each year workers all over America experiencing repetitive motion injuries feel the same way.<sup>1</sup> And you'd be surprised at what may be causing this pain.

Bad posture, how you move your body, doing the same motion over and over again – these workplace habits can lead to major discomfort. Even if you have a supportive office chair, high-tech tools or work with state-of-the-art equipment, you still may have pain if this gear hasn't been properly adjusted for your body.

## A BETTER WAY TO WORK

There's something that can help. It's called "ergonomics." Ergonomics is the science of looking at a workstation, job tools and job tasks to make sure they're safe and efficient. The goal is to make sure you have what you need to do your job well and stay healthy. Because every person and every job is different, it's important to examine each person individually.

## TIPS FOR WHERE YOU WORK

Most people have a job that takes place in one of four settings: office, industrial, service and health care. Check out the setting that best describes your workspace for tips on how to be more productive and more comfortable.

### Office

If you work in an office, chances are you're one of the 139 million Americans who work on a computer.<sup>2</sup> With all of this computer work, five percent of workers now have carpal tunnel syndrome. This is a very common injury to the hand or wrist caused by doing the same motion over and over. It often happens because the person is using office equipment that's not set up for their individual weight, height or body type. People who have to take time off of work due to carpal tunnel syndrome take on average of 27 days to recuperate.<sup>3</sup>

Back problems, headaches and problems with vision can also be caused by poorly adjusted equipment. Here are some things you can do to help improve your office ergonomics:

#### 1. Sit the right way at your computer.

- Make sure your feet are planted firmly on the ground. Your knees should be bent at a 90 degree angle. If you can't raise or lower your chair to the right height, try using a footstool.
- Your upper arms should be perpendicular to the floor. Your lower arms should be parallel to the floor, creating a 90 degree bend in your elbows.
- Your keyboard should be right underneath your hands with your wrists straight.

- Adjust your screen to be one arm's length away from your body. The top of the screen should be at eye level so you aren't straining your neck.
2. **Get up and stretch.**
    - Every 15 minutes, change positions and stretch for about 15 seconds.
  3. **Shed some light.**
    - If you have a window near you, position your computer screen so the natural light is *not* directly in front or in back of it.
    - Try not to sit right under a fluorescent light.
    - Use an antiglare screen to eliminate any reflection.

## **Industrial**

Industrial jobs are physically demanding. Here are some tips to help you avoid injuries on the job:

- Use power tools with triggers that let you use more than one finger. When you repeat the same motion over and over again with the same finger, it can lead to injury.
- Always use padded and protective gloves when you're using equipment that vibrates.
- Only lift as much as you can safely handle on your own. Also, lift within your "power zone," which is above your knees, below your shoulders, and close to your body.
- Use tools with extensions so you can work comfortably while standing – not reaching above your head. If you need to reach up, use a step stool to avoid putting your body in an awkward position.
- If you have to kneel, use a kneeling platform or kneeling creeper – a padded kneeling platform on wheels with chest support.
- Wear steel-toed shoes to protect your feet.
- If you stand or walk on a hard surface all day, try wearing shoe padding to reduce fatigue.

## **Service**

Here are tips to help make your job as a service worker more comfortable:

- Wear supportive shoes if you're on your feet. If you can, replace the insoles of your shoes every few months to keep them supportive.
- Use shoulder supports with a pad if you're carrying items on your shoulders.
- If you stand at a counter for long periods of time without being able to walk around, try using a sit-lean stool, an anti-fatigue mat and supportive footwear to reduce the pressure on your lower body.
- Use your legs and bend from your knees if you're doing any lifting. If you're moving heavy objects, try using a lifting platform, wheeled table or cart for extra support.
- Rather than reaching above your shoulders or below your knees, try using a step stool or tools with extensions. A "grabber" with a long handle can help pick up small objects on the ground or overhead.
- If you work around hot grease, wear protective gloves and use cleaning tools with long handles. Also, make sure there are anti-slip surfaces on the ground so you don't slip and fall on a greasy floor.

## **Health care**

The health care industry is unique. Jobs in this industry may take place in a variety of settings – office, kitchen, maintenance, security, technical, laboratory or patient care. You may perform office, service *and* patient care tasks. Or maybe you do maintenance and technical work. If you work directly with patients, you may be lifting, transferring or assisting them on a regular basis, making safety especially important.

Here are some tips for patient care jobs:

- If you're helping to move a patient, stand as close to them as possible. Make sure to keep your knees bent and feet apart. If you can, try using a slip sheet, slide board, sling, belt or mechanical lift for extra support.
- If you're helping a patient in the bathroom, lift from your legs, not with your back. Also, raised toilet seats, shower chairs and grab bars can be helpful.

### **A job well done**

It's always easier to prevent an injury than recover from one. By learning good ergonomics for your job, you can help protect yourself and those around you. And, you can be more comfortable while doing it.

If you have questions about your workspace ergonomics, talk to your employer. Or, you can use online resources such as the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) website at **AskJAN.org** which can be a good source of job accommodation ideas.

### **GO YOU**

1. <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/osh/case/ostb2202.pdf>
2. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ciuaw.t02.htm>
3. *Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011)*. Nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses requiring days away from work.

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