

Prevent Workplace Pains & Strains!

It's time to take action!



MSD Facts

MSD account for:

- 42% of all lost-time claims
- 42% of all lost-time claim costs
- 50% of all lost-time days

MSD Warning Signs:

1. Workers making their own modifications to tools or workstations.
2. Workers wearing splints or supports.
3. Workers massaging muscles or joints or shaking their limbs.
4. Workers commenting about or reporting pain, discomfort, or fatigue.
5. Workers avoiding a certain task or job because it hurts them.

What are workplace pains and strains?

Workplace pains and strains are also known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI), Cumulative Trauma Disorder (CTD) and Repetitive Motion Injury (RMI). These types of injuries affect the muscles, tendons, ligaments and nerves.

MSDs develop as a result of the effects of repetitive, forceful or awkward movements on bones, joints, ligaments and other soft tissues. Workers may experience symptoms such as discomfort, pain, numbness, tingling, weakness and restricted movements.

MSD is not a medical diagnosis; it is an umbrella term for a group of injuries. Some of these injuries include:

- Back Pain (low back strain, etc.)
- Muscle Strain
- Tendonitis
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)
- Rotator Cuff Syndrome
- Tennis Elbow (epicondylitis)
- Shoulder Pain (shoulder myalgia)

Workers are more likely to suffer an MSD if they perform jobs with MSD risk factors that include repetitive movements, forceful efforts, and fixed or awkward postures.

Why should you be concerned about workplace pains and strains?

Workplace pains and strains can be serious and disabling for Ontario workers, causing pain and suffering ranging from discomfort to severe disability. The consequences are far reaching and can affect every aspect of a worker's life.

MSDs are also costly for Ontario's employers. They are the number one reason for lost-time claims reported to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), resulting in huge direct and indirect costs for Ontario employers.

From 1996 – 2004, Ontario's workers compensation system approved more than 382,000 MSD lost-time claims. These claims led to nearly 27 million lost-time days and direct costs of more than \$3.3 billion.

It is estimated that from 1996 – 2004, Ontario's employers paid more than **\$12 billion** in direct and indirect costs related to MSDs. Examples of indirect costs include overtime, equipment modifications, administration, retraining and lost productivity.

Your eyes and ears are your best MSD risk identification tools.

In many cases it is easy to see the MSD risks in your workplace. Here are some things to look for:

1. Work that places the elbows above shoulder height, or the hands behind the body.
2. Tasks that call for frequent bending or twisting of the neck.
3. Work requiring frequent or prolonged grasping and holding objects, or frequent wrist movements.
4. Work that requires frequent lifting of items from below knee height or above the shoulders.
5. Work requiring frequent bending or twisting at the waist.
6. Tasks that involve carrying, lifting, pushing or pulling heavy or awkward loads.
7. Spending long periods with a body part held in any one position without movement.

Involving workers and listening to their concerns is critical when it comes to preventing MSDs in the workplace.

Workers know their jobs and they know what parts of the job cause them pain, discomfort or fatigue and frustration. That is why it is important to involve your workers in the process of identifying, assessing and controlling MSD risk factors in the workplace.

A participative approach is proven to be successful because it allows workers to suggest innovative, practical, low cost solutions.

Workplace pains and strains can be prevented!

There is a strong link between exposure to the work-related risk factors for MSD and the development of these disorders.

These injuries **can be prevented!** Taking appropriate steps to eliminate, or reduce the exposure to the work-related risk factors, will minimize the risk of MSDs in the workplace.

MSD prevention can be simple and inexpensive. Often making straight-forward and basic changes can reduce MSD risks significantly.

Prevention is good business

As with almost all health and safety issues it is less expensive to prevent an injury than it is to make changes and corrections after an injury has occurred. Don't wait for an MSD to happen. Taking proactive steps now to reduce your workers' exposure to MSD risk factors will pay off in the future.

Having a program to prevent MSDs has been shown to have many positive outcomes:

- Healthy workers, who are free from discomfort, are more efficient
- Reduced WSIB lost-time injury claims and the associated direct and indirect costs
- Improved ability to bring workers back to work if they have been injured
- Less strenuous and more straight-forward job tasks makes it easier to train and place workers
- Improved ability to retain experienced, knowledgeable and skilled workers
- Improved employee satisfaction, morale and well-being
- Reduced administrative costs related to claims management and investigations
- Increased quality, productivity and profits

Preventive steps for employers

Regardless of whether or not workers have reported MSD symptoms, or whether or not they have filed WSIB claims, MSD prevention needs to be a key part of a workplace health and safety program. MSD risk factors should be handled like any other workplace hazard. Employers should:

- Advise and train workers about the MSD risk factors in their job and in the workplace
- Encourage workers to participate in the health and safety program through early reporting of MSD symptoms or concerns
- Identify and assess job related MSD risk factors
- Put in place controls to reduce workers' exposure to MSD risk factors
- Follow-up to make sure preventive measures are working

Health and Safety Associations

Construction Safety Association of Ontario (CSAO)
www.csaio.org

Education Safety Association of Ontario
www.esao.on.ca

Electrical Utilities Safety Association (EUSA)
www.eusa.on.ca

Farm Safety Association Inc (FSAI)
www.farmsafety.ca

Industrial Accident Prevention Association (IAPA)
www.iapa.on.ca

Mines and Aggregates Safety and Health Association (MASHA)
www.masha.on.ca

Municipal Health and Safety Association of Ontario (MHSOA)
www.mhsao.com

Ontario Forestry Safe Workplace Association (OFSWA)
www.ofswa.on.ca

Ontario Safety Association for Community and Health Care
www.osach.ca

Occupational Health and Safety Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. (OHCOW)
www.ohcow.on.ca

Ontario Service Safety Alliance (OSSA)
www.ossa.com

Pulp and Paper Health and Safety Association (PPHSA)
www.pphsa.on.ca

Transportation Health and Safety Association of Ontario (THSAO)
www.thsao.on.ca

Workers Health and Safety Centre
www.whsc.on.ca

Workplace pains and strains and the law

Having a program to prevent MSDs in the workplace is not only the right thing to do; **it's also the law.**

The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act) requires employers to ensure that workers are aware of the hazards associated with the workers' job and workplace, and that controls are implemented to reduce the risk of injury from these hazards. MSD risk factors in the workplace must be treated the same as any other workplace hazard.

Heads Up!

The Ministry of Labour enforces Ontario's labour laws, including OHS Act. During workplace visits Ministry inspectors will be asking questions about the steps your organization has taken to prevent workers from developing MSDs.

For more information on how to get started

To get more information on how to develop and implement an MSD prevention program, contact your health and safety association. A list of Ontario's health and safety associations is available at:

- Ministry of Labour
www.labour.gov.on.ca
- WSIB
www.wsib.on.ca
- Prevention Dynamics
www.preventiondynamics.com

More information and resources are available from various Ontario Safety Associations at: www.preventionbestpractices.org/msd/

Consultants are also available to help organizations get started with an MSD prevention program. A directory of consultants is available on the Association of Canadian Ergonomists' website at: ACE Consultants Directory (www.ace-ergocanada.ca).