

Ergonomics Is For Everyone



Ergonomics. It's a word you hear a lot in the workplace these days, and it affects your safety, health, productivity and comfort on the job.

Ergonomics is the study of how tools and the working environment fit the worker. Ergonomics takes into account limitations of the human body in a work situation, and the differences in size, shape and ability among different people.

The science of ergonomics is a fairly new idea in the work environment. In the past, workers were expected to adapt themselves to fit the work and the equipment. Now the work and

equipment are expected to fit the person. One focus is prevention of injuries in the muscles, joints and nerves which can be caused by repetitive work, strain, impact or vibration. People who do the same task over and over throughout the shift — such as assembly line workers or keyboard operators — are among those most frequently subject to repetitive strain and cumulative injuries. These problems might start out as minor aches and pains, but they can end up as permanent injuries such as back problems. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is one common type of repetitive injury that can lead to a permanent disability in the hands and wrists.

Your employer relies on the resources of experts to design tools, machinery and work stations which are safe and comfortable to use. But you may also be able to do quite a bit yourself to improve your work area and tools even more.

Here are some examples:

- Adjust your work station for a better fit. This could mean raising your chair, lowering your work bench or obtaining a foot rest. You might be able to rearrange the lighting or set your work surface at a better angle.
- Adapt your tools. Use tools which are designed to keep your hands, arms and back in a comfortable, natural position while you work. Use tools with longer, padded handles, or angled better to lessen strain and vibration.
- Arrange your area for the way you work. Lay out tools and materials where you can reach them without excessive stretching, bending or twisting of your body. Store materials on shelves at a comfortable height so you don't have to do as much lifting.
- Take breaks. Plan your work so you can switch from one task to another to avoid back problems and repetitive strain injuries. Be sure to use your scheduled breaks to stretch and move around.
- Pay attention to how you feel when you work. For example, if you feel muscle strain, try to adjust your work station to prevent it.

Take an "ergonomic" tour of your work area. Consider what you can re-arrange to prevent problems such as muscle strain and harmful repetitive motions.