

## Preventing Sprains and Strains

### *Always Keep your Position in Mind*

Many companies that voluntarily implement ergonomic programs demonstrate that simple and inexpensive ergonomic interventions, are available to reduce MSDs (Musculoskeletal disorders), such as strains, sprains and tendonitis. Ergonomics is the science of fitting the task to the person, rather than physically forcing the worker's body to fit the task. Ergonomic related injuries are so prevalent in the workplace that the incident rate in 2017 was 35 per 10,000 full-time employees, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). This fiscal year alone, 13 Northwestern employees suffered strain, sprain or tendonitis related injuries. This means that on average, per injury, employees missed work or had to perform different tasks for 16 days per the life of the incident. This also means that job tasks ordinarily performed by the injured employee would be given to coworkers to complete.

MSDs are soft-tissue injuries to muscles, tendons, and ligaments that usually develop gradually. They typically occur in the neck, back, shoulder, elbow, wrist and knee. Some of the factors that cause MSDs are forceful exertion, repetitiveness, awkward postures, environmental stresses, and individual differences. When these factors are present, MSD symptoms such as numbness, swelling, fatigue, discomfort, stiff/tight muscles, tingling, and pain can arise. Once symptoms occur, it is crucial to make modifications to work conditions and practices, so an injury doesn't take place. If symptoms are ignored, they can lead to injuries that require more extensive treatment or permanent disability.

### **For Additional Information**

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936

*Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management at [gwen.butler@northwestern.edu](mailto:gwen.butler@northwestern.edu) for details.*