

SECTION 2: MINIMIZING ERGONOMIC HAZARDS

I. Awareness of Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs):

Signs and symptoms of MSDs of the upper extremities may include pain, numbness, or tingling of the fingers, wrists, elbows, or shoulders. Chronic back and neck problems may result in pain, numbness, or tingling that radiates to the arms or legs, as well as limited back motion.

Back pain and other ergonomically-based symptoms can result from acute injury due to a single overexertion incident, or may result from cumulative trauma due to chronic overexertion, improper work practices, or poor working postures. Cumulative trauma may be exacerbated by inadequate work-rest cycles.

II. Preventive Actions:

Reducing the risk of MSD problems can be achieved by:

- Evaluating the workplace to identify MSD risk factors;
- Encouraging employee awareness and providing education;
- Using ergonomically appropriate work practices;
- Making ergonomically sound workplace adjustments;
- Properly using ergonomically designed tools and furniture (i.e., providing flexibility for adjustments and allowing for proper individual posture);
- Performing five minutes of alternative work activity for every 30 minutes of continuous, high intensity, repetitive work (for example: after two hours of continuous keyboarding, devoting 15 minutes to non-repetitive motion activities like returning phone calls or filing);
- Seeking evaluation and intervening as soon as symptoms of MSD occur;
- Using proper lifting techniques;
- Obtaining assistance or using mechanical lifting devices for tasks that exceed an individual's capabilities.

III. Early Intervention:

Early intervention is essential to the long-term prevention of and quick recovery from MSDs. It is extremely important for employees to report any MSD symptoms as soon as possible. MSDs usually develop gradually; symptoms such as pain, numbness, and tingling in the upper extremities are often ignored until the condition becomes chronic or permanent injury occurs. Employees experiencing symptoms are encouraged to contact their supervisor or Occupational Safety to schedule an ergonomic evaluation.

IV. Workplace Evaluations:

The ergonomics program and services described in these guidelines are applicable to all persons working at UR. Priority will be given to employees with reported MSD symptoms, employees with diagnosed MSDs, and employees who work in identified high-risk jobs or departments. Occupational Safety Unit staff members are available to help with evaluating and redesigning workstations, tasks, and work practices. An ergonomic self-assessment should be completed prior to calling EH&S at 275-3241 to schedule an appointment for a workstation evaluation. See the EH&S webpage regarding help with ergonomic concerns -

<https://www.safety.rochester.edu/safetyinfo/helpwithergoconcerns.html> for further information. Note: it is recommended that an employee requesting an ergonomic assessment speak with his/her supervisor before making the appointment.

V. Reporting:

Employees experiencing signs and symptoms of MSDs need to promptly report them to their supervisor. Employees should file online incident reports to ensure proper notifications are made for Worker's Compensation and EHS. Employees are encouraged to go to University Health Service (UHS) or Occupational Medicine for an evaluation. This does not preclude employees from going to their own Health Care Professional (HCP).

VI. Training:

Upon new hire, employees will be trained on sound ergonomic principles and practices. Information regarding sound ergonomic principles is presented as part of the annual safety training (mandatory for all employees). Occupational Safety can provide individual education during work site evaluation or on request.

VII. Record keeping:

Records of employee reports of MSDs, MSD signs and symptoms, ergonomic hazards, responses to such reports, workstation assessments, hazard control measures and records of work restrictions and the HCP's (Health Care Professional) written opinion are kept on file under the Worker's Compensation Program of the UR. Employees and, with written permission, their representatives, are provided with access to these records.