

According to data obtained by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, work-related musculoskeletal disorders (often referred to as MSDs) account for 35 percent of lost workdays in the United States each year, as of 2007. These disorders also account for one out of every three dollars spent on workers' compensation. To reduce the frequency and severity of MSDs in the workplace, it is important to have knowledge about some of the most common MSDs and their symptoms. Only then can you begin to take steps to reduce the likelihood of employees developing MSDs.

What are Musculoskeletal Disorders?

Musculoskeletal disorders include a group of conditions that affect the muscles, nerves, ligaments, joints and spinal discs. They represent a wide range of disorders, which can differ in severity from mild periodic symptoms to severe chronic and debilitating conditions. Some types of MSDs include:

- Tendonitis
- Rotator cuff tendonitis
- Epicondylitis (commonly called "tennis elbow")
- De Quervain's Syndrome
- Trigger finger syndrome
- Nerve compression syndromes
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Low back disorders
- Lumbar disc syndrome
- Raynaud's syndrome
- Vibration white finger

Musculoskeletal disorders may also be referred to as repetitive strain injuries, repetitive motion disorders, cumulative trauma disorders and overuse syndromes. MSDs can occur to all parts of the body, but most commonly affect the back, neck, shoulders and upper limbs.

Musculoskeletal disorders occur in every industry; however, the occupations with the highest incidence of MSDs include: police, nursing, truck drivers, laborers, material movers, janitors and construction workers.



What Causes Musculoskeletal Disorders?

A great deal of research has been conducted to identify workplace conditions that contribute to the development of musculoskeletal disorders. The research indicates that MSDs usually develop as a result of employee exposure to ergonomic risk factors. These risk factors are described in the EMC Tech Sheet: Ergonomic Risk Factors.

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Signs and Symptoms of Musculoskeletal Disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders can cause severe and debilitating problems, such as:

- Decreased range of motion or grip strength
- Loss of function of a body part
- Pain, numbness and tingling
- Cramping, stiffness or loss of dexterity
- Reduced worker productivity
- Absenteeism or extended lost time from work
- Temporary or permanent disability
- Inability to perform job tasks
- Increase in workers' compensation costs

Can Musculoskeletal Disorders Be Prevented?

The best way to prevent the development of MSDs is to implement and maintain an effective workplace ergonomics program. This includes observing jobs for the presence of risk factors, making improvements to reduce or eliminate the risk factors and treating employees who are showing symptoms. The EMC Loss Prevention Information Manual section titled "Ergonomics Program" is an excellent resource for developing your own ergonomics program. Information is also available from the sources listed below.

For Additional Information

National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health:

Health: www.cdc.gov/niosh

- Musculoskeletal Disorders

Occupational Safety & Health Administration:

www.osha.gov

- Ergonomics Safety and Health

EMC Insurance Companies: www.emcins.com

- Tech Sheets