

Ergonomic Breaks

by
State Compensation Insurance Fund

Ergonomic injury risk factors include forceful movements, repetitive motions, awkward postures, and lack of rest. Rest periods give the body time to recover from work; breaktime exercises and stretches strengthen the body. Workers should think of themselves as Industrial Athletes; athletes wouldn't participate in a sport without proper rest and warm-up, so use the same preparation on the job.

Maintaining overall health reduces your risk of injury. Get a good night's sleep to rest your body and maintain alertness. Eat healthy foods and drink fluids to boost energy and stay hydrated. Aerobic exercise and weight training increase strength and vitality. Stretching, yoga, and Pilates improve flexibility and build core body strength.

Pay attention to signs of discomfort and fatigue on the job; these are warning signs from your body. As muscles tire during a work task, slouching can lead to poor posture, sloppy, uncontrolled movements, and injuries. Rest breaks mean recovery for the body. During a job task, take micro-breaks lasting 2-5 seconds every twenty minutes. Take mini-breaks lasting 3-5 minutes every thirty to sixty minutes. These short breaks give the body a rest, reduce discomfort, and improve your performance.

Alternate your work activities and postures throughout the day. Rotating tasks may seem inefficient, but the rest and use of different muscle groups increases energy and maintains productivity. For example, if you are a landscaper, don't trim all of the shrubs, sweep up the trimmings, and then leaf-blow the whole area; work in sections and trim, sweep, and leaf-blow in alternating tasks. If you work at a single workstation and job task all day, move into different postures while you work: first standing, then standing with one foot resting on a stool, then sitting.

Stretches help you warm-up before work and relax during breaks; they increase flexibility and boost blood flow and oxygen to muscles. Perform stretches slowly and gently; avoid extreme postures and stop stretching if you feel pain or discomfort. For stretching and other warm-up exercises suited to your particular job task, contact your State Fund Loss Control Office and ask for an Ergonomic Specialist.

Overall fitness and flexibility, adequate sleep, task rotation, and rest breaks can help reduce ergonomic risk factors and prevent injuries. ••