

Being Smart about Sprains & Strains

4 Key Recommendations to Keep Your Workforce Safer

Strains and sprains account for a major portion of injuries suffered in the construction industry. These injuries are often caused by lifting, pushing, twisting, prolonged bending or overreaching and normally affect the back, shoulders, and arms. A sprain or strain can happen in a moment, but can take days or months to heal. Strains and sprains can be costly both in lost time and money.

Help your employees avoid sprains and strains by following these four key recommendations:

Practice proper lifting techniques – Lifting items that weigh too much or lifting incorrectly accounts for many strains and sprains. Prior to lifting, have the worker(s) consider the weight, size, and shape of a load. Even when utilizing proper lifting techniques there are limits to the weight and amount of materials a person can safely carry. Workers need to test the load before attempting to lift. If they're not sure they can handle the load, they should get help from another worker or break the load down into smaller parts. If they can't break it down, have mechanical assist devices available for use.

Carry the load correctly – Even moderate loads can cause injury if handled using poor technique. Train workers to carry a load close to their bodies. When carrying a load, they should know to avoid bending at the waist or twisting. To lower a load or set it down, bend at the knees, not the waist. And to turn while carrying a load, turn using their feet, not twisting at the waist.

Avoid awkward positions/overreaching – Working for long periods of time in an awkward, bent-over, or twisted position can strain or sprain body parts. Because strain increases in proportion to the distance of the work from the body, workers should try to keep their bodies close enough to their work such that they are not reaching, or hunching over. There's less strain on the body if the work is positioned between the shoulders and waist, with a waist-high level being the most neutral and comfortable. They may also need to raise or lower themselves for better positioning.

Keep physically fit – Encourage your employees to get plenty of exercise and make healthy food choices. If muscles or ligaments have weakened over time from lack of exercise or age, they're more likely to strain or sprain than if they're physically fit.

Employee training in proper lifting techniques and working postures should be an important component of your Injury and Illness and Prevention Program. During an employee's initial job orientation meeting, make it clear that safe work practices and employee well-being are an integral part of the job.

If employees understand why it's in *their* best interest to practice correct lifting techniques and working postures and how an injury can negatively impact their quality of life, they may become more conscious of practicing those techniques and postures to avoid injury.

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