

Stress & Strain: Work Related Injuries

Is work sometimes a pain in the neck, literally? Do you come home with irritated eyes or knotted muscles? It might surprise you, but you may be suffering from work-related strains; injuries caused through an overuse or misuse of a muscle or body part. Moreover, injuries at work are shockingly common. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 1998, an estimated 120.9 million workers were covered by workers' compensation. In fact, the Center for Disease Control notes that every single day "9,000 Americans suffer a disabling injury on the job, 16 die from these injuries, and another 137 die from work-related diseases." Therefore, it pays to know how to avoid work-related injuries.

Generally, blue-collar and white-collar workers face different pains on the job because their job duties are so remarkably different. Read on to discover the different strains of the two working worlds and tips on how to avoid them.



blue-collar blues


Manual labor is the defining quality of blue-collar jobs. Common blue-collar jobs include construction, mining, assembly, renovation, and operating heavy machinery. When you aren't held hostage in an office and you work with your hands (and entire body), the work can be grueling and potentially damaging. Cuts, bruises, puncture wounds, and trauma injuries are not uncommon in the blue line of work. Furthermore, heavy machinery and constant lifting can strain your back, cut off your digits, or damage your noggin. Blue-collar men have to be extra careful to use proper precautionary measures, protective equipment and know the risks of their jobs.



Common Strains Include:

Muscle injuries

The most common side effect of manual labor is muscle aches and strains. Improper posture when bending or lifting, or forcing or bearing too much weight on improperly trained muscles can easily lead to muscle injury. Symptoms include pain, swelling, and stiffness in muscles.



Among major disabling injuries and illnesses suffered by American workers in 1998, carpal tunnel syndrome led the pack, with workers missing a minimum 24 days a year on average.

How to avoid it: Gradually building strength, not overloading the weight you carry and performing tasks at a safe speed, all aid in preventing muscle injury. Stretching before physically taxing jobs can warm muscles, increase flexibility and build strength, making you less prone to tears and damage.

Back pain

When you are constantly lifting and turning during the day, you can easily pull a muscle in your back and experience chronic stiffness in your upper or lower back and/or spinal column. Symptoms of back problems include stiffness, muscle knotting or tension, and radiating pain in your spinal column, either while active or sedentary.

How to avoid it: The old adage is true: bend with your knees and lift with your thighs, not your back. Do not hunch over and haul large loads with your back, under any circumstance! Poor form can send you to the hospital with a slipped or herniated disk and, at worst, you could be out of commission (and work) for weeks or months.

Likewise, if you have a sore back, use a heating pad and relax for a couple of days. If the pain comes

back, evaluate how you could alter your job duties to be more back-friendly and maybe invest in a back brace or visit a licensed chiropractor.

Hernia

Yet another reason to learn to lift and bend correctly, a hernia is a protrusion, consisting of an organ or body part, which has escaped from its natural cavity, and projects through some natural or accidental opening in the walls of your innards. Usually, an unsightly bulge and some discomfort occurs with the presence of a hernia. A hernia of the abdominal viscera, where your intestine slips and starts poking into the empty space near your groin, is the most common. Sometimes surgery is needed to repair the damage.



How to avoid it: Because forcing too hard (while pushing or pulling) or lifting too much weight can cause hernias, go easy while completing hard tasks. Also, if you feel any unnatural pain while working, cease what you are doing immediately and if you continue to notice anything unusual, check with your doctor.

Sciatica

Sciatica is directed pain that travels down the leg, which is caused by irritation of the main nerve into the leg, known as the sciatic nerve. This pain tends to originate where the nerves pass through and emerge from the lower bones of the spine (lumbar vertebrae). The most common cause of true sciatica is a "slipped disc," though other internal problems could be at the root of the problem.

How to avoid it: Practice the same precautions as with back pains and see your health care provider if the condition persists.

Arthritis

Years of hard work and brisk or jarring motion can wreak havoc on joints. If you grip tools regularly with a lot of force, or you are constantly exerting force on your joints, you could be at risk for developing osteoarthritis in your hands, feet, knees, and hips. If you experience pain, swelling around joints, stiffness -- particularly in the morning -- or bumps on your hands, knees or feet, you could be experiencing arthritis symptoms.

How to avoid it: It is wise to employ moderation in the execution of strenuous tasks and use aids like levers or power tools when possible. Rest frequently during high-impact tasks like using a jackhammer or running around the work site.

Dislocation

Dislocation injuries occur when a body part moves from its normal position, like the displacement of a bone from its socket. Lifting too much weight or falling by accident can pop your shoulder out of its socket, twist your knee or dislodge your hip. They can be extraordinarily painful and require immediate medical attention.

How to avoid it: However, dislocation can be controlled with attentiveness and caution while working. In essence, don't climb unstable ladders, don't work on unstable footing, and don't work at heights without a harness.