7 MINUTE Safety Trainer: Computer Workstation Exercises

GOALS

This safety session will teach employees to:

- Understand that computer work may cause eyestrain, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), and injuries to the nervous system or soft tissue such as muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, cartilage, or blood vessels.
- Perform simple exercises at their workstations to reduce their chance of sore, achy muscles, and more serious injuries.
- Rearrange their workstations to fit their bodies better.

Applicable Regulations: None

1. **Computer work may not seem hazardous, but awkward positions and repetitive motions can cause painful injuries.**
   - Eyes may feel dry and uncomfortable after hours spent looking at a computer screen.
   - Hands and wrists may have a number of symptoms, including swelling, tingling, numbness, burning sensation, or loss of strength or coordination.
   - Shoulders may have pain, stiffness, or loss of mobility.
   - Back and neck may experience shooting pain or stiffness.
   - Arms and legs may feel stabbing pains or numbness.
   - Feet and toes may experience tingling, numbness, coldness, stiffness, or a burning sensation.
2. **Even very short breaks will help to minimize the effects of sitting for hours working at the computer.**
   - **Eye breaks:** Every 15 minutes, look away from the monitor and focus on something at a distance of about 20 feet for a minute or so.
     - This allows your eye muscles to relax.
     - Also, blink rapidly for a few seconds to moisten the eye's surface.
   - **Minibreaks:** Between bursts of typing or mousing, allow your hands to relax in a flat and straight posture for several seconds.
   - **Rest breaks:** Take a short rest break every 30 to 60 minutes.
     - Stand up and have a drink of water, make some photocopies, etc.
     - Leave your computer workstation for a minute or so.
3. **Make exercises that focus on different areas of the body a regular part of your daily routine.**
   - **Hand stretches:** Make a fist, then extend and spread your fingers.
     - Hold each position for several seconds and then allow your hands and fingers to relax.
   - **Wrist and forearm stretches:** Lace your fingers and, with elbows pointed out, straighten your arms until you feel the stretch.
     - Hold that position for several seconds and then relax.

©BLR®—Business & Legal Resources

- **Shoulder stretches:** With elbows out, move your arms back to bring your shoulder blades together.
  - —Then, reach your arms overhead and stretch; bend from side to side.
- **Neck stretches:** Rotate your head up and down.
  - —Turn your head from side to side.
  - —Tilt your head toward each shoulder.
- **Back stretches:** Bend forward in your chair and touch the floor.
  - —Grasp your shin or knee and pull your knee toward your chest (do this while sitting).
  - —Stand up, place your hands on your hips, and bend backwards.

4. **One of the best ways to reduce your exposure to MSD risk factors is to adjust your work space or workstation to fit your body.**
   - An ergonomic chair should have a comfortable and wide seat, and the height should allow your feet to rest flat on the floor.
   - The backrest should have an adjustable lumbar support.
   - The chair should have a curved front edge so that it does not put pressure on the back of your thighs.
   - Armrests should be broad and cushioned and should properly support your shoulders, elbows, and wrists.
   - The computer monitor should be placed directly in front of you, and you should not have to tilt your head up or bend your neck down to see it.
   - Lighting should be adjusted to avoid glare and reflections on your computer screen.
   - The keyboard must allow you to keep your wrists flat and in line with your forearms.
   - Frequently used work items should be in front of you and within easy reach so you can avoid awkward postures or excessive stretching.
5. **If you find yourself feeling achy after your day's work, speak to your supervisor to see if there are ways to make your job or workstation more friendly to your body.**

DISCUSSION POINTS:

Try these exercises to see if they feel good to you. Has this lesson suggested ways that you could rearrange items at your workstation to make it more comfortable?

CONCLUSION:

Following good ergonomic principles that fit your job to your body can help you avoid painful injuries.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE:

Have your trainees take the Computer Workstation Exercises quiz. By testing their knowledge, you can judge whether they understand some of the actions they can take to make their computer work more comfortable and avoid fatigue and injuries or whether they need to review this topic again soon.

©BLR®—Business & Legal Resources