



Preventing Ergonomic Injuries

Ergonomics in the workplace is how humans interact with their surroundings and the equipment used to do the job. In different industries, some factors that can lead to ergonomic injury include:

- Repetitive movements and pace of work.
- Static positions.
- The tools and/or equipment used.
- Awkward or extreme postures, including the force of the work.
- Temperature extremes.
- Vibration and pressure.
- Work shifts, including extended workdays and shortened time between shifts.
- Health conditions, including lack of physical conditioning and other individual injury factors.

Some data collected shows that leading causes of injury are slips, falls, and muscle strain. Slips and falls can also be prevented in the following ways:

- Cleaning up spills right away.
- Where practical, use non-slip matting (unless floors have non-slip surfaces).
- Posting warning signs for wet floor areas.
- Wearing non-slip footwear.
- For laced shoes — lace and tightly tie them.
- Eliminate cluttered or obstructed work areas.
- Do not run in the workplace.

Some tips to eliminate ergonomic injuries:

- Anti-fatigue mats for static standing work (when they can be safely used).
- Shifting your weight and changing positions often when standing. For static work, alternate elevating one foot approximately six inches every 20 minutes.
- Using both hands to carry large, heavy items.
- Getting help to move heavy items, including trash cans or awkward items.
- Keeping knives sharp so that this reduces the forces needed to cut (including box knives — replace blades regularly).
- Working at comfortable heights.
- Keeping regularly used items close and in front of the body.

Ideas to reduce lifting and moving hazards

- Tapping the item or the box if you are not familiar with its content or weight before lifting.
- In most cases, using both hands to hold items.
- To prepare your mind and body for a lift, stand directly in front of the item.
- Keep feet equal distance to your center of gravity (this is how babies lift!).
- Know where you are going with the item.
- Use handles if available.
- Don't over stack items which may block your view.
- Bend at the knees and squat down with your legs (again, think about how babies lift!). Use the strength of your legs to lift.
- Avoid quick movements or twisting.
- Move at a comfortable pace.
- Bend legs to put item down — similar to how you lifted it.

Additional Resources:

Oregon OSHA

Easy Ergonomics — <https://osha.oregon.gov/OSHAPubs/3347.pdf>

OSHA

Youth Worker Restaurant Safety — <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/index.html>

Cal/OSHA

Improving Manual Material Handling Lifting — https://www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH/etools/08-004/lifting_use.htm

Ergonomic Guidelines for Manual Material Handling —
https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/mmh.pdf