

# FOR THE LEADER

Ergonomics T201404-01

# BEFORE THE TALK PREPARATION TIPS **AFTER THE TALK CHECKLIST** Be prepared to demonstrate appropriate ergonomic posture for your ■ Provided extra training to workers who did workplace environment. poorly on quiz Check with your company to ensure that women in your company have Date: access to PPE that is designed for the female body. ■ Observed workers Teach your employees about "ergo breaks" (see <a href="http://www.stanford.edu/">http://www.stanford.edu/</a> dept/EHS/prod/general/ergo/microbreaks.html for details) Date: Refresher training S Date: \_\_\_ Ш ■ Other (describe) Date: Date: Location: \_ Meeting conducted by:\_\_ MEETING WAS ATTENDED BY: Each participant is to sign below, for record kept on file. Answers to T201404-01 Quiz: 1. False, 2. False, 3. True, 4. True, 5.D

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# **Women at Greater Risk for Ergonomic Injury**

Women are twice as likely as men to suffer ergonomic-related injuries. There are several reasons for this difference, including the fact that personal protective equipment is often designed for men, not women; female-dominated careers such as healthcare often require prolonged sitting, standing or awkward postures; hostile work environments may discourage asking for or offering help; and the fact that women are less tolerant of temperature extremes, which can increase their risk for back injuries and other musculoskeletal disorders.

#### WHAT'S AT STAKE

Failing to follow good ergonomics practices can bring long-lasting, painful and sometimes debilitating consequences. Repetitive and forceful movements, exposure to vibration, and poor posture all contribute to injuries of the muscles, nerves, joints, cartilage, and tendons.

Tradeswomen often report their physical strength being "tested" by their male counterparts and feeling as though they cannot ask for help. Feeling like you can't ask for help, or that you can't accept if it's offered, or that it's a much bigger deal for a woman to ask for help, is a problem—one that can lead to workers overexerting their physical capacity and injuring themselves.

#### WHAT CAN GO WRONG

Jennifer had stopped asking for help with heavy items after being ridiculed by some of her male co-workers. So when she came across a heavy box in the aisle of the warehouse, she lifted it and pulled a muscle in her back. The pain she felt caused her to then drop the box on her foot, rupturing several of her metatarsal ligaments. Jennifer was rushed to hospital, where she was told that her foot might never heal.

#### **HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF**

Limit:

- Strenuous work requiring balance or lifting weights of more than 50 pounds (23 kilograms). Know your limits, ask for help and encourage others to ask for help.
- Prolonged sitting or standing.
- Physical exertion in temperature extremes. Hot weather can cause muscle fatigue, while cold weather can make the muscles less flexible, increasing your risk for injury.

Ask your supervisor for:

- Education and training on signs and symptoms of musculoskeletal disorders, including pain or soreness; tingling, numbness or loss of sensation; swelling, stiffness or inflammation of joints, weakness; lack of coordination; and cold hands.
- Education on neutral postures and correct body mechanics for activities such as lifting and lowering, pushing/ pulling, holding and carrying objects.
- Ergo breaks: These are short breaks that give your body a chance to rest and reduce discomfort.
- Personal protective equipment especially designed for women.
- Adjustable workstations.
- Aids such as carts, dollies or conveyors to reduce the need for lifting.

#### **FINAL WORD**

Learning to recognize the early warning signs of MSDs, and knowing how to reduce your chances of injury can make a huge difference in your quality of life, both on and off the job.

Meeting material to go: Safety meeting materials such as presentation tips, PowerPoint presentations, quiz answers and more are downloadable at www. SafeSupervisor.com

### **TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE**

- You should not ask for help when your work requires you to lift an object that is too heavy for you.
   True
   False

  You should criticize someone when
  - they ask for help. □True □False
- Good posture can prevent injury.
  □True □False
- 4. Musculoskeletal disorders can interfere with a person's quality of life.□ True □ False
- 5. You can protect yourself from ergonomic injuries by:
  - a. Taking "ergo breaks"
  - b. Using an adjustable workstation
  - c. Wearing PPE that is designed for your body type

You and several other female co-workers

d. All of the above

## **What Would You Do?**

are working in an environment where asking for help with heavy lifting brings scorn. Can you think of ways in which you and your female co-workers can team up to help one another and reduce your potential for injury?