Heavy Work Means Strains and Sprains

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Safety Talk

Lost work days, pain, and missed deadlines can be the result of on-the-job injuries. The most common of these are strains and sprains. Unfortunately, in some professions, strains and sprains are part of the job. Most workers, though, would rather live without this “job perk.” In this Safety Talk, we’ll learn about the difference between strains and sprains, discover the risk factors that increase the likelihood of a strain or sprain, and discuss how these injuries can be prevented

What Can Go Wrong
Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are injuries to soft body tissues, like muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Sprains and strains are both MSDs. A sprain is an injury to a ligament, which is the tough, fibrous tissue that connects bones to other bones. A strain, on the other hand, is an injury to either a muscle or a tendon, which is the tissue that connects muscles to bones. The most common types of strains and sprains are to the back, ankles, knees, and wrists.

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- repetitive motions, like hammering, typing, or lifting;
- forceful exertions, like pushing or pulling heavy objects; and
- vibration, like when a power drill is used or sitting inside a heavy vehicle.

Environmental factors, such as extreme temperatures or poor lighting, also lead to strains and sprains.

How to Protect Yourself

The best way to prevent strains and sprains is to eliminate or reduce the risk factors that cause them. Here are a few tips to keep injuries to a minimum.

1. Warm up and stretch. Athletes warm up by stretching their muscles to reduce sprains and strains. So should you.
2. Use proper lifting and carrying techniques. Squat to the floor, keeping your heels off the floor; lift with your legs, not your back; keep the load close to your body; and don't twist your upper body to turn. Turn your feet instead.
3. Know when to get help. Ask for assistance if a job is too big for you to physically handle on your own.
4. Plan ahead for safety. Before starting a task, place the materials and equipment you will need close to where they're going to be used.
5. Use the right personal protective equipment (PPE) for the job. Knee pads, shoulder pads, or vibration reducing gloves are examples of equipment that can help reduce sprains and strains.
6. Power up. Use power tools whenever possible to reduce repetitive motions and vibration.

FINAL WORD

Sprains and strains shouldn't be considered "part of the job." Identify the risk factors and then use the tips in this Safety Talk to reduce or eliminate them.