Using Tools and Equipment to Prevent Strains – School Safety Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Think about all the tasks we perform daily that involve some level of physical exertion. Whether it's moving supplies, setting up equipment, or even just reaching for things in awkward places, we often rely solely on our own strength. However, repeatedly performing these actions without the aid of appropriate tools and equipment can put significant and cumulative stress on our bodies. This can lead to a higher risk of musculoskeletal disorders, chronic pain, and reduced physical capacity over time.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Relying solely on our physical strength when tools and equipment are available can introduce several key dangers. It often leads to awkward postures, overexertion, and increased force on our muscles and joints. Let's break down some of the specific risks.

- **Increased Risk of Strains and Sprains:** When we try to lift or move heavy or awkward items without the proper equipment, we often end up using incorrect lifting techniques, putting excessive strain on our backs, shoulders, and other muscle groups.
- **Overexertion and Fatigue:** Repeatedly performing tasks that could be aided by tools can lead to muscle fatigue and exhaustion, making us more susceptible to injury as our muscles become tired and less able to support our movements. Think about repeatedly carrying stacks of books from the library to a classroom by hand. Over time, this can lead to muscle fatigue in the arms and back, increasing the chance of sudden strain.
- **Awkward Postures and Repetitive Motions:** Trying to compensate for a lack of the right tool often results in adopting uncomfortable and unnatural body positions. Performing these awkward movements repeatedly can lead to musculoskeletal disorders.
- **Increased Force on Joints:** Without the leverage or support provided by tools, our joints can absorb excessive force during tasks like pulling, pushing, or lifting, increasing the risk of conditions like tendinitis or joint pain.

- **Potential for Dropped Objects and Collisions:** When we're struggling to handle something without the right equipment, we're more likely to lose our grip or control, potentially leading to dropped objects that could cause foot injuries or collisions with our surroundings.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Preventing strains when using tools and equipment at school involves knowing your resources, using them correctly, and adopting smart work practices.

Know and Utilize Available Equipment

- **Rolling Carts and Dollies:** For transporting multiple or heavy items across distances.
- **Hand Trucks:** For moving bulky or stacked items.
- **Adjustable Height Desks and Tables:** To accommodate different tasks and postures.
- **Ergonomic Chairs:** Providing proper support for prolonged sitting.
- **Step Stools and Ladders (of appropriate height and stability):** For safely reaching high items.
- **Lifting Straps and Harnesses:** To assist with lifting and carrying heavy or awkward loads, often distributing weight more evenly.
- **Reach Extenders/Grabbers:** To avoid bending or overreaching for items.

Avoid carrying multiple heavy items by hand when a cart is available. Don't use unstable objects like chairs or desks to reach high places – always use a proper step stool or ladder. Refrain from lifting extremely heavy or awkward items alone if lifting straps or assistance are available.

Maintain Equipment: Regularly check the condition of tools and equipment before use. Report any damage or malfunctions promptly so they can be repaired or replaced. Using damaged equipment can lead to accidents and injuries. Make sure wheels turn smoothly, handles are secure, and adjustable parts function correctly.

Plan Ahead: Before starting a task, think about the potential for strain and identify tools or equipment that could make the job safer and easier. Proactive planning can prevent unnecessary physical exertion. For instance, if you need to access items on a high shelf, locate a stable step stool before you start reaching.

Request Necessary Tools: If you frequently encounter tasks where the lack of appropriate tools increases the risk of strain, communicate these needs to your supervisor. Advocating for better equipment contributes to a safer working environment for everyone.

Employ Good Body Mechanics with Tools: Even when using tools, remember to maintain good posture and apply proper body mechanics. For example, when pushing a loaded cart, keep your back straight and use your leg muscles to propel it.

FINAL WORD

The tools and equipment we have are there to help us. Let's make sure we know how to use them and prioritize them in our daily tasks to protect our wellbeing.