

THE ERGONOMIC SOLUTION TO "BACKBREAKING" TASKS

The signs of a backbreaking task are easy to spot—frequent accidents, complaints about the task, low production, abnormally high levels of scrap. You don't have to look very hard to discover them.

The science of ergonomics studies ways to make workers more comfortable with the machines and materials they use in the workplace. It involves redesigning workstations and the ways jobs are performed so that workers can get more done with less effort.



Tilted bins allow workers to remove materials from them without bending.

Take the Problem Out of the Task

A typical ergonomic solution might be to tilt bins and large cartons so that workers can remove materials from them without bending. Another solution might be to install a mechanical lifting aid or change the height of a shelf, chair or table.

Ergonomic changes attempt to reduce potential dangers and make jobs less stressful. Such redesign of manual tasks has been known to reduce industrial back injuries substantially.

Simple Cures


Fortunately, there are many simple ways to design the problem out of backbreaking tasks. For example:

- ▶ If you're doing a lot of lifting and twisting, try to rearrange the space to avoid this. People who have to twist under a load are more likely to suffer back injury.
- ▶ Rotate jobs so that periods of standing alternate with moving or sitting. Ask for stools or footrests for stationary jobs.
- ▶ Store materials at knee level whenever possible. Make shelves shallower. Break up loads.
- ▶ If you must carry a heavy object some distance to your workstation, consider storing it closer, request a table to rest it on, or try to use a handtruck to transport it.

Stretch Breaks Save Backs

Most workers' compensation injuries occur during the first few hours of work, when muscles are cold and tight. Most of these problems are garden-variety back pain caused by a lack of flexibility and strength, not by a serious musculoskeletal disorder.

For this reason, a number of companies are now offering workers stretch breaks to warm up muscles and improve flexibility. Stretching for just eight minutes before work has reduced worker sprains and strains by as much as 40% at some companies.

Many companies are going a step further and encouraging employees to be more physically active away from the workplace. A lifetime commitment to a simple bending-and-stretching routine, practiced just a few days a week, greatly reduces the risk of back injury. 

©1991 PARLAY INTERNATIONAL 1200.047



Most injuries occur during the first few hours of work when muscles are cold and tight. Just eight minutes of stretching before work can reduce your risk of strain or sprain.