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Supporting a Healthy Organization

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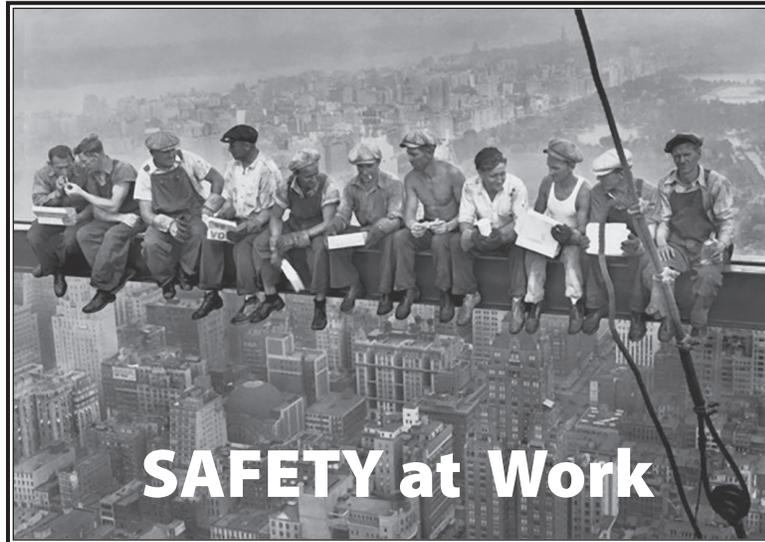
Summer 2017

Most of us take for granted that we'll go to work and return home safely each day. Until we or someone we know gets hurt, we might not give it much thought. The reality is someone is injured at work every seven seconds. Fortunately, according to the National Safety Council (NSC) most workplace injuries are preventable. Whether you work at a desk, on a factory floor, behind the wheel of a truck or in a classroom, safety should be an important part of your workday.

The NSC cites the most common types of work-related injuries to be sprains and strains, soreness or pain, and cuts or punctures. Typical causes include tripping or falling, improper lifting, repetitive motion and contact with objects such as being struck or crushed by equipment.

Your employer probably maintains a workplace safety policy, but it's *your* responsibility to understand hazards in the workplace and look after your own wellbeing. Here are some tips to stay safe on the job.

Focus on unique aspects. This article cannot address every potential safety concern in all work settings or for all diverse needs. There are unique and critical safety considerations for each occupation. For example, health care employees need to be aware of and follow standards for bloodborne pathogens and needle stick safety given the potential for exposure to blood or other potentially infectious materials. In human services and other occupations dealing with public emergencies, employees need



SAFETY at Work

to be aware of the risks associated with the unpredictability of human behavior and emotions. Maintaining safety at work in any occupation should include specialized training, regular discussions with a supervisor, as well as advanced planning. For example, health care employees need specialized training for the handling of materials with pathogens. Behavioral health care employees and first responders need training in de-escalation and violence prevention. And employees working with the public benefit from training in communication and conflict management skills.

It's also critical to consider human diversity with regard to mobility, sight, hearing, etc. as we plan for our safety at work.

Give Falls the Slip. Falls are the leading cause of workplace injuries and fatalities. To avoid falling:

- As you move about, keep an eye on the floor in front of you for spills.
- If you see a spill, wipe it up or call someone to clean it.

- Wear nonskid shoes for work in kitchens, outdoors or anyplace where slippery surfaces are common.
 - Never lean on railings or climb on shelves or storage units to reach things. Use only approved ladders.
 - Always use a safety harness when working at heights.
- Lift wisely.** Take your time, ask for help and alternate heavy lifting with less physically demanding tasks. Follow the rules of good posture while lifting:
- Place feet at least shoulder-width apart.

- Stand as close as possible to the object being lifted and hold it close to your body.
 - Avoid twisting or bending forward when lifting and carrying.
 - Bend at the knees instead of the waist.
 - Tighten your stomach muscles when lifting and lowering.
- Know the drill.** Understanding fire safety is important for any occupation.
- Review the fire plan for your worksite regularly. Practicing in a fire drill at regular intervals is an effective way to remember escape routes, meeting spots, and procedures.
 - Keep your workspace tidy. Clutter can fuel a fire and block access to exits, sprinklers and emergency equipment.
 - Maintain machinery to prevent overheating and sparks.
 - Assess for electrical hazards and avoid overloading power strips.
 - Use and store chemicals in well-ventilated areas. Many chemicals emit

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vapors that are highly flammable and can be set off by something as small as a spark from a faulty wire.

- Know locations of fire extinguishers and learn how to use them.
- Post emergency telephone numbers for quick access in case a fire starts in your work area.

Read the manual. Improper use of machinery and tools can cause serious wounds. When using work equipment, always:

- Set up the equipment according to manufacturer's guidelines.
- Follow correct operational procedures.
- Request training if you're unsure how to operate machinery safely.
- Wear appropriate protective apparel, including safety glasses, gloves and hard hats. If your work involves hazardous chemicals, flying debris or projectiles, wear goggles or a face shield.

Check with your human resources department or the person charged with overseeing OSHA compliance for equipment use instructions, training and protective gear.

Tune up your workstation. Ill-fitting equipment and furniture can lead to a literal pain in the neck — and eyes, back, shoulders, arms, and legs. Repetitive motion and poor posture can cause injuries. Sit and stand with good form. Align ears with the shoulders and keep chin parallel to the floor. Avoid leaning to one side and bend at the hips instead of rounding shoulders when leaning forward.

Here's how to analyze and correct every level of your workstation:

- **Top.** Arrange your chair and desk so you sit with your head directly above your shoulders, about an arm's length from your computer screen. Position screens at or slightly below eye level, directly in front of you, 18-22 inches from your eyes.
- **Middle.** Your elbows should rest on a surface as you type so your shoulders stay down and comfortable. Keep both wrists relaxed and straight, without flexing up or down while typing or using a mouse. If you use a wrist rest, position it to the level of the space bar.
- **Bottom.** A supportive swivel chair with adjustable seat and backrest is ideal. Position your chair's backrest to support the slightly natural curve in your lower back. When seated, your back should be upright or inclined forward slightly from the hips. If you can't adjust the chair back, use a lumbar roll or small pillow. The chair's height should allow your thighs to remain horizontal with your feet flat on the floor or on a footrest. If needed, set your feet a low stool or footrest.

RESOURCES

OSHA safety and health training materials: [osha.gov/dte/library/index.html](https://www.osha.gov/dte/library/index.html)

Calculate your personal risks: [nsc.org/forms/safetycheckup.aspx](https://www.nsc.org/forms/safetycheckup.aspx)

Improve flexibility and balance: [acsm.org/access-public-information/articles/2012/02/02/improving-your-flexibility-and-balance](https://www.acsm.org/access-public-information/articles/2012/02/02/improving-your-flexibility-and-balance)

Repetitive motion injury prevention: [rsiprevention.com/rsi_prevention.php](https://www.rsiprevention.com/rsi_prevention.php)

Tips for a healthier back: [investeap.org/health-issues/exercise-and-fitness/tips-healthier-back](https://www.investeap.org/health-issues/exercise-and-fitness/tips-healthier-back)

Take five and stretch. Periodic breaks in the day can reduce musculoskeletal injuries. Consider a five-minute breather after every 30 minutes of continuous activity. Move around, get a drink of water and stretch your muscles. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends these simple stretches:

- **Upper back.** Sit up straight with arms relaxed and chin level. Slowly pull your shoulders back and press your shoulder blades together, contracting the muscles between them. Hold for a count of 5, relax, and repeat 3 times.
- **Hamstrings and low back.** Sit with legs extended and feet together. Lean forward from the hips, keeping your back straight and knees soft, and reach for your ankles. Hold for 15-30 seconds.
- **Neck.** While sitting or standing, look straight ahead and slowly bring your right ear toward your right shoulder, hold for 5 seconds, then rotate your head so you're looking down and hold for 5 seconds. Rotate your head to bring your left ear toward your left shoulder, hold, then rotate to look down. Repeat several times. Next, look straight ahead and then slowly turn your head to look over your shoulders, right then left, holding each position for several seconds.

Stay Sober. Use of alcohol or drugs dramatically increases the risk of mistakes and accidents. Employees who have substances in their system during work hours are prone to harming themselves and their coworkers. Review your employer's drug and alcohol policy and know how to react if you suspect a co-worker of being impaired — your safety may depend on it. If you have concerns about your own substance use, contact Invest EAP. It's confidential!

Share the load. Keeping safe at work is everyone's responsibility. All employees need to speak up if unsafe conditions exist. If you recognize or identify a safety issue, notify your supervisor and help your coworkers take precautions.

Safety is everyone's responsibility.

- Tune in to specific safety issues for your occupation and your abilities.
- Practice good workplace habits to prevent falls and fire, and to lift properly.
- Use equipment according to manufacturers instructions and wearing protective apparel.
- Arrange your workspace to fit your body and practice good posture.
- Stay alert and unimpaired on the job.
- Plan for and learn how to manage workplace hazards, accidents and emergencies.



EAP is here to help. For more information about articles in this newsletter, or any other EAP-related topic, please call one of our trained counselors at our toll-free number:

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