Spot The Safety Violation: Proper Posture Prevents Pain

Is this worker's posture and positioning suited to safe keyboard use'

Although not as dangerous as industrial workplaces, offices can still expose workers to safety hazards. For example, poor posture and positioning while working on a computer can lead to carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis and other musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) associated with keyboard work.

The worker in this picture is doing three things that increase his risk of an MSI:

1. He's hunched over in a posture that places stress on his back, neck and shoulders.
2. Because his wrists are anchored to the desk surface, he has to stretch his fingers and twist his wrists to reach the keys.
3. Leaning his forearms against the desk creates contact stress.

Safe Posture for Sitting at Computer Workstations

The OHS laws in all Canadian jurisdictions'either expressly or implicitly'require employers to protect workers from ergonomic hazards. So if your workplace is an office or you have any workers who spend time in front of a computer, make sure that

they maintain an ergonomically neutral posture, which is one in which:

- **Hands**, **wrists** and **forearms** are straight, in-line and roughly parallel to the floor;
- **Head** is level (or bent slightly forward), facing forward, balanced and in line with the torso;
- **Shoulders** are relaxed;
- **Upper arms** hang normally at the side of the worker's body;
- **Elbows** stay close to the body and are bent between 90ø and 120ø;
- **Feet** are fully supported by the floor or a footrest if the desk height isn't adjustable and are slightly forward;
- **Back** is fully supported with appropriate lumbar support when the worker is sitting vertically or leaning back slightly;
- **Thighs** and **hips** are supported by a well-padded seat that's parallel to the floor; and
- **Knees** are about the same height as the hips.

The positioning of the computer monitor is also important for preventing MSIs:

- The worker shouldn't be too close to or far from the computer screen'20 to 40 inches is optimal.
- The monitor shouldn't be tilted too far left or right. It should be tilted no more than 35ø degrees to either side.
- The monitor or keyboard also shouldn't be too high or low to use in a neutral posture.

To keep your workers from developing MSIs regardless of the type of work they do, you should:

- Understand employers' legal obligations under the OHS laws

- Identify and assess ergonomics-related hazards
- Implement measures to address those hazards, using these techniques to cut through senior management's resistance and get money for ergonomics improvements
- Use these seven strategies to make your ergonomics program a success.

In the Ergonomics Compliance Centre, you'll find more articles and tools, including::

- Office Ergonomics Risk Factor Checklist
- An infographic of exercises for office workers
- Lifting Hazard Assessment Checklist
- Manual Handling Checklist
- Model Worker MSI Symptom Survey
- Ergonomic Risk Factor Checklist
- Checklist for Evaluating Ergonomics Programs
- Form for Investigating Neck, Shoulder and Upper Back Injuries
- Form for Investigating Injuries to the Hips, Knees and Feet
- Form for Investigating Elbow, Forearm and Hand Injuries.