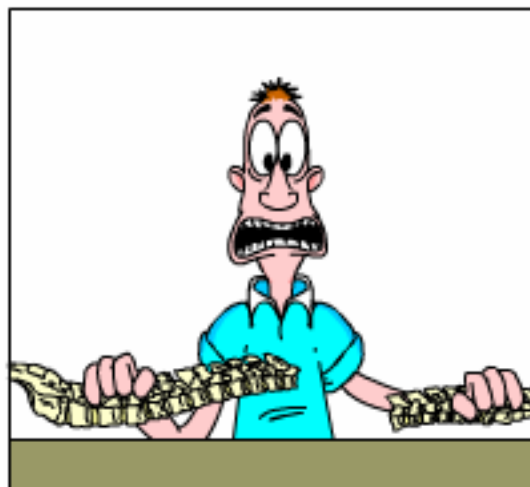
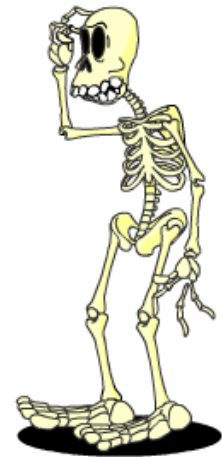


If you Ignore, more Discomfort's in Store!

More and more people are falling victim to the recurring discomfort of musculoskeletal disorders. MSD or a Musculoskeletal Disorder is defined as an injury and disorder of the muscles, nerves, tendons, ligaments, joints, cartilage and spinal discs. Exposure to physical work activities and conditions that involve risk factors may cause or contribute to MSDs. MSDs do not include injuries caused by slips, trips, falls or other similar accidents. Other names for MSD's include cumulative trauma disorders, repetitive strain injuries, repetitive motion trauma, occupational overuse syndrome and cumulative trauma disorder.

Tissue (commonly muscle or tendon) can be injured during daily, routine activities. These injuries occur as a result of decreased blood flow or added strain to the tissues. This can cause nerve compression, tendon damage, muscle strain and joint damage. Initially the injury is unnoticeable and a regular night's sleep heals the injury. Over time, tissue damage is carried over into the next day. Eventually, this damage can accumulate to the point that a regular night's sleep no longer heals the damage and a musculoskeletal disorder has developed.

MSDs are now becoming more and more prevalent. Common causes for developing a MSD include; awkward postures (excessive bending, twisting, or reaching) excessive force (lifting heavy objects or using unnecessary force to do repetitive work such as typing) highly repetitive work, extended duration of effort, sustaining one position for an extended period of time, mechanical trauma (contact with sharp edges or other surfaces that compress or damage the underlying tissue) vibration, and cold and hot temperature extremes.



Symptoms

The symptoms of a work related MSD injury could be one or more of the following:

- Pain, stiffness, swelling, numbness or tingling in the hands, wrists, elbows, shoulders, back or neck
- Discomfort which is brought on by carrying out a particular task, which then improves when no longer doing it, e.g. if the pain lessens or disappears over weekends, or during holidays
- Discomfort starting in one area e.g. neck and back, and then spreads to other parts of the body. Early warning signs may manifest as sore shoulders or neck pain, particularly when travelling home in the car after a day at work. Equally the affects may present the morning after as aches and stiffness in the limbs and hands.
- Symptoms are worse at night or first thing in the morning – your hands or lower arms feel weak and you may frequently drop objects.
- You may have trouble pinching or grasping things and/or performing detailed tasks such as writing or tying your shoe laces. You may also have difficulty performing tasks that require strength such as opening a sealed jar or using a screwdriver.



Early symptoms are often slight and usually infrequent. For example, the symptoms may only appear after excessive use of the hand for a specific task. Once the hand and wrist are rested there may be no symptoms at all. As the use of the hand/wrist increases with repetitive tasks the symptoms worsen.

Musculoskeletal disorders occur over an extended period of time and the quicker they are reported and treated the better your chance of recovery. When these MSDs are not recognised the condition will only worsen. If you believe you have a problem you should report it to your manager straightaway. A VDU assessment should be completed at your workstation. Remember a MSD is very treatable at the early stages, but even a short delay in seeking rest and treatment can set back recovery by weeks, months or even years. It is vital that you do not ignore the early warning signs.

Prevention

The General Application Regulations 1993 states that all employers are obliged to ensure that a competent person carries out an ergonomic risk assessment at all the individual VDU workstations used by habitual VDU users (A habitual user is defined as an employee who normally uses a VDU/Display Screen for continuous periods of more than one hour).

This ergonomic assessment should look at the equipment used (chair, desk, monitor, mouse etc), software, ventilation, lighting levels, access & egress, good housekeeping, space requirements etc. There are minimum requirements and standards required which cover all these areas. This assessment should also evaluate the employee's routine, positioning and seating in relation to their VDU and training levels provide to staff.



With regard to taking breaks, frequency rather than duration is important – short frequent breaks are more beneficial than longer irregular breaks. Rest breaks prevent the onset of fatigue and subsequent deterioration in performance and allow muscles that have been active to rest and recover.

Taking a Break

Type of Break	Definition	Recommended Frequency
Micro break/pause	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Short pauses which should be taken during heavy typing or mouse use e.g. check your voicemail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Take a 30 second pause every 10 minutes of VDU work
Regular PC Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none">PC activity should STOP during this time. Do non PC related work or do an activity that takes you away from your desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Take 10 minutes every 2 hours