

Repetitive Motion and Cumulative Trauma

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Overview

Repetitive motion injuries are caused by repeating the same action over and over. These types of injuries are long-term and can affect you years later. Therefore, it is very important to learn how to avoid them.

For Discussion

The following are conditions that may be caused by repetitive motion. You should know these symptoms, so you can make changes or treat them before they become serious.

Tendinitis is a form of tendon inflammation that occurs when a muscle or tendon is repeatedly tensed from overuse, vibration or unaccustomed usage of the wrist and shoulder.

Tenosynovitis is an inflammation or injury to the sheath surrounding the tendon. Repetitions exceeding 1,500 to 2,000 per hour produce these symptoms.

Trigger Finger, another tendon disorder, is caused by the creation of a groove in a finger tendon. The groove causes the finger to jerk or snap when moved.

Reynaud's Syndrome or white finger can occur when the blood vessels of the hand are damaged as a result of repeated exposure to vibration for long periods of time.

Cumulative Trauma Disorders (CTD) are strains that may result from long-term repetitive motion. Not all muscle discomfort and fatigue indicate a cumulative trauma disorder. Everyone experiences occasional aches and pains from both work and play, especially when you're not used to the activity. It is when you repetitively work in awkward and stressful positions that you end up with a CTD.

You can help avoid repetitive motion injuries by following these guidelines:

- Warm up before a physically demanding task; stretching will prepare your muscles.
- Plan ahead. Try to make awkward jobs less stressful to your body.
- Rotate work positions to change how muscles are used. This helps prevent repetition.
- Use the proper tool for the job to avoid awkward movements and overexertion.
- Take short frequent breaks instead of fewer long breaks.
- Carefully stretch tired or overworked muscles throughout the day to improve circulation and relieve tension.
- Use equipment designed to prevent CTDs when appropriate.
- Always use proper lifting techniques; back strain is one of the most common CTDs.
- When using hand tools, keep wrists in a "natural" position instead of bending up, down, or sideways. There are tools available that are made to prevent unnatural positions.
- Just because a co-worker is not affected by a certain task doesn't mean that it won't affect you. Don't ignore the messages your body sends you.

If you have some early symptoms of chronic discomfort, report them immediately to your supervisor. The sooner a better tool or work position can be incorporated into your work activities, the sooner your symptoms can be controlled.

Questions

1. What can you do differently to avoid a repetitive motion injury?
2. What repetitive motion injuries might you sustain?
3. When should you talk to a supervisor about repetitive motion issues?