



PARTNER UPDATE

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WORK PARTNERS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS

www.WorkPartnersOHS.com

November 2018

Overcoming Your Fear of Ergonomics

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We hear the words “ergo” or “ergonomic” thrown around a lot. “I recently purchased an ergonomic chair.” “Check out my new ergonomic mouse.” “I love my water bottle. The grip is so ergonomic.” People use this phrase because it means that the device fits them. It was created to fit and blend well with the already existing design of the human body. This is important. It is not trying to fit the person to the chair, the mouse, or the water bottle. It is fitting the chair, mouse, and water bottle to the person.

The root of the word ergonomic comes from the Greek word ergo, which means work, and nomos which means law. Hence, work-law. The goal of ergonomics is to create the best fit between the person and the work environment. And contrary to what many may believe, the goal is not to buy expensive equipment, but rather to educate, adjust, and adapt the workspace for long-term safe daily function.

The more “ergonomic” a work station is, the less stress it will put into a person’s body. If a computer is too high, the person will have to extend their head to face the screen and thus increase compression of the joints in the neck. This position held for a sustained period of time will inevitably lead to overuse of the muscles in the neck, which can lead to musculoskeletal problems and pain in the neck.

Understandably, employers often have mixed feelings and hesitations when it comes to contracting for ergonomic evaluations. Knowledgeable risk managers clearly appreciate the benefits to reducing injuries and claims, yet companies may be hesitant to open up the proverbial can of worms. But consider for a moment the tested and proven value of ergonomics in both injury prevention and financial returns. An ergonomic assessment can help detect risk factors that can lead to work related injuries before they happen, correct problems to prevent future injuries, and promote better work place behaviors and patterns. As a Doctor of Physical Therapy at WorkPartners specializing in treating workplace injuries, I often treat the end result of ergonomic imbalance, wishing I had an opportunity to intervene in a proactive and preventative capacity. This makes it especially rewarding for me to perform onsite, on-the-job ergonomic assessments. Yet because WorkPartners does not sell any ergonomic devices or equipment, I can utilize my specialty training as a certified ergonomist to make objective, cost effective recommendations. This approach from a therapy standpoint is somewhat unique in this space, and affords me the opportunity to holistically identify potential exercise and risk modification options, then create a solution that can provide a balanced, comprehensive approach to injury reduction in the workplace.

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One may still wonder, is ergonomics really going to save our company money? Is it worth spending time and resources to fix something that is not a clear problem yet? On top of preventing injuries, ergonomic assessments can save companies significant sums of money. According to a study done by Liberty Mutual, "Every \$1 invested on safety/ergo has a \$3 to \$6 return on investment." Work injuries are very costly for companies. According to the National Safety Council in 2016 there were 4,530,000 work related injuries leading to a cost burden of \$151.1 billion. The average cost of a single work-related musculoskeletal disorder is \$20,500 according to OSHA in a 2010 study. The indirect costs include loss of productivity, hours searching for new hires, and training new personnel up to speed. Work related injuries are expensive.

Do not overlook the value of prevention with an ergonomic assessment. Give your ergonomics specialist a call today to discuss assessment options. If you haven't worked with one, WorkPartners Occupational Health Specialists offers ergonomic assessments for office and industrial work spaces.

About WorkPartners Occupational Health Specialists

Located in San Diego County, WorkPartners clinics are full service Occupational Health clinics dedicated to supporting the health and wellness of local employees. Learn more at www.WorkPartnersOHS.com.