
Understanding Ergonomics and Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs)

Ergonomics means improving the fit between your body and an activity. One example is changing a workstation so a small person can better reach materials or machinery. The result is more comfort and efficiency. You can use ergonomics to make any task—done any place—less taxing on your body.

Why you should care

If you don't think about ergonomics, the activities you do may, over time, lead to a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD). MSDs are a group of health problems that often affect soft tissues (muscles, tendons, and nerves) and joints. MSDs most often affect the back and wrists. But your whole body is at risk. MSDs can damage fingers, elbows, and shoulders. They can also harm the neck, arms, legs, ankles, and feet. Left untreated, an MSD may limit your range of motion. Or it may make it hard to grip objects.

Symptoms of an MSD

MSDs often start with a feeling of discomfort. You may notice swelling or muscle fatigue that doesn't go away with rest. Some people feel tingling or numbness. At first, the discomfort may come and go. But with time, symptoms may become constant. Muscle weakness and nerve problems may develop.

Preventing problems at work and home

Using ergonomics on the job lowers your risk of getting a work-related MSD. By acting now, you may save yourself months of future discomfort and time away from work. And don't think of ergonomics only at work. Use its principles in all you do and treat your body right 24 hours a day.

By any other name

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) says MSDs are a group of health problems linked to ongoing damage to soft tissues. Problems such as these may also be called:

- Repetitive motion injuries (RMIs)
- Repetitive strain injuries (RSIs)
- Cumulative trauma disorders (CTDs)