



**Australian Government**

**Comcare**

# PREVENTING BODY STRESSING INJURIES— INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES

## WHAT ARE BODY STRESSING INJURIES?

Body stressing is one of the common sources of the aches and pains you may experience at work. Body stressing injuries include muscle strains, back conditions, and tendonitis/tenosynovitis. It is difficult to attribute a specific cause to these types of injuries and work may only be one factor. For most people these episodes settle and it is usually possible to remain at work or return to work quite quickly with appropriate assistance. It is important that you learn to recognise early warning signs of body stressing injuries and make your manager aware if you are experiencing symptoms.

## WHAT CAUSES THESE INJURIES?

Body stressing injuries can be caused by a variety of manual tasks<sup>1</sup> that you do in your everyday activities. Some work practices involving lifting, sustaining postures, and using repetitive movements may increase your risk. Recent research has also found that stress in the workplace may also directly influence your risk of body stressing injury.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REDUCE THE RISK OF THESE INJURIES?

- > **Take regular breaks** to move around the office. These trips could be for getting water, toilet breaks and walking to a colleague's desk to talk rather than e-mailing. Walking to the farthest bathroom, standing up while talking on the phone and a five minute walk at each coffee break may also reduce the risk of injury from sedentary duties.
- > **Ask for some assistance** to set up your work area to avoid strain and awkward postures.
- > **Follow instructions** and undertake training to ensure your risk is reduced. Use any safety equipment provided as instructed.
- > **Contribute to safe working practices** by discussing with your manager or Health and Safety Representative (HSR) any possible work hazards, including faulty equipment. You may be able to help develop strategies to address body stressing injury risks.
- > **Talk to someone early** if you are feeling symptoms at work. Discuss issues with someone who can help such as your manager, Human Resource personnel, independent Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or Harassment Contact Officer (if appropriate).
- > **Find out what support is available to you.** Check with your Human Resource section, rehabilitation policy, or intranet website. Your workplace may offer options such as changes to work hours, duties or the way work is managed.
- > **Review your health status** with your general practitioner. Early medical treatment for stress or physical symptoms is important to recovery.

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<sup>1</sup> Manual tasks is defined as any activity requiring a person to use any part of their musculoskeletal system in performing their work. National Standard for Manual Tasks, ASCC, August 2007.

### WARNING SIGNS OF RISK OF BODY STRESSING INJURY

- > regular feelings of discomfort or pain
- > tired all the time/sick and run down
- > not getting things done at work
- > feeling overwhelmed by your workload
- > lacking in confidence or unable to concentrate
- > feeling stressed at work
- > needing to take extra time off work

### WHAT CAN YOUR EMPLOYER DO TO HELP?

- > assess your workplace/workstation and identify risks or possible contributing factors
- > if necessary provide modifications or alterations to your work practices and duties
- > provide support and any specialised equipment you may need to promote recovery
- > provide a rehabilitation programme if you need assistance to return to work
- > refer you to a specialised rehabilitation provider who will coordinate your care

### RESOURCES:

1. National Code of Practice – for the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders from performing manual tasks at work 2007.
2. National Standard for Manual tasks (2007)
3. Employers have responsibilities under the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 and the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991.