

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Repetitive Strain Injuries in School Districts Minimize Strain and Maximize Comfort By Mark Nease

Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs) are common occurrences. Through the repetitive use of a certain body part, typically the hands, arms and upper extremities, micro injuries to our muscles, tendons and nerves occur. Because this initial damage does not trigger a sudden pain, some tend to continue the repetitive activity until it's too late and a strain injury may result.

Common examples of RSIs include:

- **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome.** A condition caused by the compression of the median nerve through the wrist, resulting in pain and numbness in the hand.
- **Tendinitis.** An inflammation of a tendon, typically in the arm or shoulder.
- **Rotator Cuff Syndrome.** Inflammation of the tendons and muscles in the shoulder.
- **Epicondylitis.** (Tennis Elbow or Golfer's Elbow). Burning pain and weakness around the elbow due to overuse of the muscles and tendons.

In order to assist in minimizing the potential for strains and maximize comfort, consider the following:

- If available, use equipment in place of manual activities. (Use a snow blower instead of shoveling snow by hand or a floor scrubber in place of mopping.)

- If equipment is unavailable and the task must be completed by hand, carefully select appropriate hand tools. (Select a 24 oz. wet mop head over a 32 oz. wet mop head.)
- Educate staff on proper body mechanics for performing tasks by hand. CM Regent's Risk Management Department can provide this training.
- Look for opportunities to make the condition user-friendly. (Place dumpster against the loading dock to allow employees to drop trash into the dumpster instead of placing it in a location which will require employees to wield/heave trash over shoulder height into the dumpster. An alternative could include building a two-step platform with handrails and a non-slip floor coating and placing the platform next to the dumpster.)
- Position your computer workstation to minimize strain on your hands, fingers, arms, back and neck and to maximize comfort.
- Rotate work tasks. (When unloading a shipment of copy paper by hand, have multiple teams of employees perform this task. Team #1 could do it for 30 minutes and then go perform another task. Team #2 could do it for the next 30 minutes and then perform another task, etc.)
- When a task requires long periods of sitting, such as administrative support positions, take mini breaks. (i.e., every 30-45 minutes, stand up and stretch.)

- Adjust your chair to adequately support your body to assist in reducing repetitive strain injuries.
- Encourage staff to stretch and exercise regularly. Staying physically fit could help reduce stressors on the body.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.