

# Tool Box Talk



## Ergonomics in Construction Trades

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### What is Ergonomics?

Ergonomics has to do with designing and arranging workplaces, products, and systems to suit the people interacting with them. One of the main goals of ergonomics is to minimize the risk of injury or harm.

### Benefits of Ergonomics

There are five proven benefits of having a strong workplace ergonomics process:

#### 1. Cost Reduction

Musculoskeletal (soft tissue) disorders (MSDs) and injuries are a common and costly category of workplace injuries. Reducing ergonomic risks and indirect costs associated with MSDs is an opportunity for significant cost savings.

#### 2. Improved Productivity

When a work environment is designed with ergonomic solutions that allow for good posture, less exertion, fewer motions, and improved heights and reaches; workplaces become more efficient and productivity improves.

#### 3. Improved Quality

In order to produce quality products — avoiding worker frustration and fatigue is key. If a job is too physically taxing for workers, it may not get done the way it was intended and compromise the quality of the product.

#### 4. Improved Employee Engagement

Reducing employee fatigue and discomfort on the job can result in a lower rate of turnover and absenteeism as well as improved morale and employee engagement.

#### 5. Improving Safety Culture

A company committed to ergonomics also shows that it values the health and safety of its workers. The overarching result of achieving the four prior benefits of ergonomics is improving company safety culture. Creating and fostering this health and safety culture will ultimately lead to better performance of the company as a whole, starting with the health and safety of each individual employee.

### Preventative Measures

There are several ways to reduce injury and repetitive stress on your body when performing various tasks. Below are some examples of preventative measures for designing an ergonomic work environment.

### Stretching

- Stretch before you start working and during short breaks (at least once per hour), and after breaks and lunch to avoid fatigue
- Stretch to warm up muscles and increase flexibility/elasticity to improve mental alertness and reduce fatigue, tension, and stress. Also, it's important to stretch if tension or stress is apparent after a lengthy task duration or an extended awkward posture.

### Use Mechanical Lift Assists and Carts

- Avoid manually handling heavy objects more than 35lbs
- Avoid carrying objects more than 100 feet

### Practice Proper Cart Handling

- Push instead of pulling; Use both hands when pushing
- Stand directly behind the cart when pushing (avoid twisting your body)
- Maintain good control and limit speed; Ensure cart is not overloaded

### Use Proper Lifting Techniques when Lifting

- Examine the load and the surrounding area—Bend knees and look forward to keep back straight when lifting a load
- Position the load close to the body and maintain a firm grip; Use smooth, controlled movements and keep arms in front of body; Turn feet in the direction of movement to avoid twisting

### Repetition

- Use power tools when available and padding on hard or sharp surfaces; Avoid pressure on palms, wrists, and elbows
- Change your position or take a break from repetitive tasks to eliminate stress; Follow job rotation policies where applicable to alternate muscle groups between successive tasks



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