

## Tips for Staying Healthy and Safe at Work

As we go to work every day, we often think about the tasks we need to do and our interactions with co-workers. Most of us may not think much about our health and safety on the job, but we probably should. Colds and other viral infections can spread quickly and can affect productivity, and more than 3 million disabling accidents occur in American workplaces every year. To avoid being sidelined by an illness or injury, start taking action today.

### Protect Yourself Against Infection

Colds and flu are caused by viruses that can pass easily from one person to another when you sneeze or cough, or handle objects contaminated with a virus. Some viruses can live up to three hours on phones, doorknobs and desks. Because most adults average about two to four colds a year, there's a good chance that germs may abound in many workplaces.

You can help limit your exposure with these tips:

- Wash your hands frequently. Be sure to scrub them with soap and warm water for 15 to 20 seconds. The scrubbing action removes germs so that you can wash them away. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based gel or wipe.
- Try not to touch your face. Once a virus gets on your hands, it still has to get inside your body. Touching your eyes, nose or mouth gives it easy access.
- Use a disinfectant. Clean surfaces such as telephones and keyboards regularly, especially if you share them with others.

If you do get sick, should you still go to work? Sometimes staying at home is a better idea, especially if you:

- Are coughing, hacking and sneezing, all of which can spread a virus
- Have a fever
- Feel nauseous, are vomiting or have diarrhea
- Are so sick that you can't do your job

If you feel well enough to go to work, try to prevent infecting others. Avoid shaking hands with anyone, always use tissues to cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and wash your hands or use an alcohol-based gel or wipe afterward.

### Make Routine Tasks Safer

Repeatedly clicking a computer mouse or turning and lifting can take a toll on your body. In fact, about half of injuries that occur in the workplace are related to frequent repetition of everyday movements such as these.

### **You can help reduce your risk of injury:**

- Vary your activities. It's important to give your body a break now and then while you're at work. It's a good idea when you're off the clock, as well. "If you're working assembly in a manufacturing environment or typing in an office, you're better off not doing those same motions when you're not at work," says Tim Morse, Ph.D., associate professor of ergonomics at the University of Connecticut.
- Check your computer setup. If you spend a lot of time working at a computer and it isn't positioned correctly, you may be risking pain in your neck, shoulders, elbows or wrists, says Jack Dennerlein, Ph.D., associate professor of ergonomics at Harvard University. To check your computer's position, stand in front of your chair. The backs of your knees should be about two inches above the seat. When you're sitting down, the top of the monitor screen should be at about eye level. Position your keyboard so that your elbows are at an angle of at least 90 degrees. This may help relieve stress on your wrists.
- Avoid overreaching. Whether or not you work at a desk, it's important to keep frequently used materials and tools within reach. When sitting, you shouldn't have to reach more than 15 inches. When standing, items should be no more than 14 inches away if you're reaching for them with both hands. If you're using just one hand, 18 inches is OK for most people.
- Listen to your body. "Little aches and pains are good indications of a potential injury," says Dr. Dennerlein. If you start having these types of symptoms, call your doctor.

### **Be Prepared for Emergencies**

Ask your supervisor if your company has an emergency action plan in case of fire, natural disaster or another emergency. Then, read it so that you'll be prepared. If your employer doesn't have a plan, consider volunteering to help develop one. The [American Red Cross](#) can help you learn more about preparing your workplace for an emergency.

### **Practice Safe Lifting**

Try not to lift more weight than you're used to carrying. How much you can handle safely depends in part on your level of conditioning. Technique also makes a difference.

To help avoid back injury, remember to lift with your legs. Here's how:

- Bend your knees.
- Keep your back straight, even when you're putting down the load.
- Hold the load close to your body and use a slow, steady lifting motion.
- Don't twist while carrying something. Instead, turn your feet and your body in the direction you want to go.

If you need to move something that's too heavy for you to lift, ask someone to help you. Or, if you're authorized to use a forklift or other device, use it to move the object.