



# Ergonomics

Real People      Real Problems      Real Solutions

## *Women and Ergonomics*

Each year almost 230,000 women miss work because they suffer work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). These painful injuries can require long recovery periods, and severely injured women may never be able to return to their jobs. More than one-third of American women's job-related injuries are caused by overexertion or repetitive motion.

OSHA's proposed ergonomics standard would protect up to 12 million women at risk of experiencing MSDs. Once effective, an OSHA ergonomics standard could prevent as many as 1 million MSDs among women over 10 years.

Ergonomics matters particularly to women because they experience a high number of the MSDs that are the most severe and the most costly. They suffer 62 percent of the work-related cases of tendinitis and 70 percent of carpal tunnel syndrome cases. In addition, in 1996, about 100,000 women suffered back injuries, costing them 500,000 days off work.

It's not that women's bodies are more vulnerable to MSDs. It's the work they perform. A large number of women work in jobs associated with heavy lifting, highly repetitive motion, awkward postures and other physical stresses. Lifting nursing home patients, sewing clothing or using a keyboard again and again can all result in injury.

MSDs may start as minor aches and pains. But left untreated, they can result in serious injuries that can be permanently disabling. It often takes a long time to recover. The median days away from work for serious injuries is 4, but the median for MSDs is 7. Carpal tunnel syndrome cases result in a median of 25 days away from work for recuperation--more than time off for amputations or fractures. And women are heavily represented among the occupations where these injuries most frequently occur--cashiers, packagers, maids and house staff, assemblers and office workers.

Women's organizations that support OSHA's moving forward on ergonomics include:

- National Council of Women's Organizations
- National Organization for Women
- National Partnership for Women and Families
- 9 to 5, National Association of Working Women
- Wider Opportunities for Women
- Women Work!

