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"It" is the number one nature of injury affecting employees throughout Oregon and the United States—strains and sprains.

Every day, people are injured while doing ordinary tasks. In fact, the ordinary nature of the tasks being performed is a major reason why these types of injuries occur with such regularity every single day. If you were to talk with workers who have suffered on-the-job sprains or strains, you'd probably discover that they had performed these types of tasks many times—perhaps hundreds of times—without being injured.

But when strains and sprains do occur, they can be costly. Strains and sprains accounted for over 33 percent of all SAIF claims in 2006 and over 40 percent of all claim costs. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. There are literally thousands more instances where workers experience pain or discomfort as a result of these same types of work activities, but they choose to work through it. In many instances, these small episodes of pain are indications of small micro-tears in muscles that will eventually lead to muscle strain.

Paying attention to these early warning signs can help prevent more serious injury. Planning work in a way that reduces the amount of force and stress on muscles, tendons, nerves, and joints can help prevent injuries from ever occurring.

There isn't a solution that can apply to every job, but there is one very basic tip that, when followed, can help protect workers from these painful and costly injuries. In fact, it can reduce the risk of strain and sprain injuries by half and save time, too.

The tip?

Keep your elbows closer to your side. Simply position your body or your work so your elbows can remain close to the side of your body. Extending your elbows away from your body dramatically increases the amount of force on your shoulder and back muscles.

Lifting a 40-pound box from a table requires more force as you move that box farther away from your body. If the box is situated on the other side of the table and you reach far across the table to start your lift, it can require as much as 50 times more force to lift that box than if the box were right in front of you. Just moving the box six inches closer to you can halve the amount of required force.

This principle applies whether the object is a 40-pound box or a small bolt that weighs only a few ounces. Reaching unnecessary distances to grab or lift an object requires additional force and can make a huge impact over time. For workers performing the same task multiple times a day, the cumulative impact of reaching seemingly small distances creates wear and tear on muscles, tendons, nerves, and joints and can eventually lead to an injury.

In most work environments, finding ways to increase productivity is an important part of keeping the business competitive and profitable. If an employee has to reach across a table to pick up the parts required for assembly of a component, the time it takes to reach out and draw the arm back is all wasted time (and motion).

It may only take a portion of a second, but if the employee reaches across a table 100 times an hour during an eight-hour work day, that can total up to five minutes a day spent doing nothing but reaching. That's 25 minutes each week and about 20 hours in a year. If 20 employees perform that same task, they spend more than eight hours of time each week just reaching for parts. Moving those parts within closer reach reduces wasted time, increases productivity, and reduces the risk of employee injury.

There's much more to preventing injuries than just positioning work closer, but this is one quick tip that can help you in your efforts to prevent sprains and strains. For additional information, visit the "safety" section of [saif.com](http://saif.com) or contact your SAIF loss control consultant.

#### Good to know

Completing an Incident Report/Analysis form after every on-the-job accident can help you recognize risks and hazards and identify solutions.

We are happy to send you the Incident Report/Analysis pad at no cost. Contact your local SAIF office and ask for publication #S540.

#### Injury facts

2006 SAIF top three injuries by "nature of injury"

| nature | # of claims | % of total claims | % of total costs |
|--------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|
|--------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|

|                 |        |      |      |
|-----------------|--------|------|------|
| 1 strain/sprain | 15,383 | 33.9 | 40.1 |
|-----------------|--------|------|------|

|                |       |      |     |
|----------------|-------|------|-----|
| 2 cut/puncture | 8,570 | 18.9 | 5.5 |
|----------------|-------|------|-----|

|                |       |      |     |
|----------------|-------|------|-----|
| 3 crush/bruise | 4,820 | 10.6 | 5.4 |
|----------------|-------|------|-----|

2006 SAIF top three injuries by "type of injury"

| type | # of claims | % of total claims | % of total costs |
|------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|
|------|-------------|-------------------|------------------|

|                |       |      |      |
|----------------|-------|------|------|
| 1 overexertion | 8,475 | 18.7 | 22.5 |
|----------------|-------|------|------|

|                         |       |      |     |
|-------------------------|-------|------|-----|
| 2 struck against object | 7,475 | 16.6 | 4.3 |
|-------------------------|-------|------|-----|

|         |       |      |      |
|---------|-------|------|------|
| 3 falls | 6,018 | 13.3 | 21.8 |
|---------|-------|------|------|