

Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) — work shouldn't hurt

RSI is an umbrella term for injuries to soft tissues (muscles, tendons and nerves) of the neck, upper and lower back, shoulders, wrists, arms and hand. Alberta's Health Care Industry has been identified as having one of the highest rates of repetitive strain injuries in the province.

What are the symptoms of RSI?

The symptoms of RSI are as follows:

- Pain dull ache
- Loss of sensation (numbness), especially at night
- tingling and burning sensation
- tenderness
- swelling around the wrist/hand
- dry shiny palm
- "pins and needles" discomfort
- loss of ability to grasp items
- impaired thumb and finger dexterity
- ganglion near tendon or joint
- muscle weakness and fatigue
- muscle spasm
- joint restriction/loss of movement
- aches/pain

If you think that you have any of the symptoms of RSI, you should begin recording these symptoms immediately. Note what symptoms you are experiencing and when they occur. Make note of any changes to your job duties and/or work environment.

What are the types of RSI?

The term repetitive strain injury is used to describe a number of different diagnoses:

- tendinitis
- tenosynovitis
- carpal tunnel syndrome
- de Quervain's
- lateral epicondylitis (tennis elbow)
- medial epicondylitis (golfer's elbow)
- rotator cuff syndrome
- bursitis
- thoracic outlet syndrome
- tension neck syndrome
- Dupuytren's contracture

What causes RSIs?

Workplace repetitive strain injuries are caused by a number of factors. In some cases a single factor is the cause but in many instances there are several factors that cause the RSI. These factors include:

- rapid repetitive movements
- lack of job variation
- inadequate rest breaks
- awkward working positions
- poor tool and equipment design
- increased workload or work hours
- supervision that causes workers to work faster or do more
- monitoring of time management
- compulsory overtime
- vibration
- forceful or awkward grip
- excessive force
- lack of control over work

How can RSI be prevented?

RSIs are preventable. The goal of a RSI prevention program should be to make the job fit the worker rather than have the worker fit the job.

1. **Early recognition of symptoms** – report your symptoms immediately to your OH&S representative and see your doctor.
2. **Workstation/equipment redesign** – tools, equipment and workstations must be designed to meet the physical needs of the worker. This is known as ergonomic design
3. **Job redesign** – your job should include a variety of duties and you need to have regular rest breaks. Workload should be managed through ensuring proper staffing levels.
4. **Education/Training** – employees and employers must be educated in the proper application of ergonomics
5. **Workplace investigation** – all workplace injuries and illness must be investigated. The focus of the investigation should be to identify the "root causes" of the injury or illness and corrective action taken.

What can I do?

- Report any symptoms of RSI to your doctor and your supervisor as soon as possible – don't wait until you are unable to work.
- Contact your UNA OH&S representative and fill out a UNA OH&S report form



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