



Sprains, Strains, and Snake Bites

If slips, trips, and falls are the bread and butter of our occupational medicine practice, then sprains and strains are the mashed potatoes and gravy. Or maybe the cake and ice cream. Whatever the food analogy, our doctors would never need another meal if sprains and strains really were food.

Let's face it: Everyone involved with workplace safety and health is well aware that sprains and strains make up the vast majority of work comp injuries. Still, few employers effectively attempt to proactively address sprains and strains at work. Those that do provide some education and hands-on tools often see results, but success depends heavily on modeling and leadership from company management and the entire safety team.

The most cost-effective way to avoid work comp claims for sprains and strains – besides keeping a ready supply of ibuprofen in the snack room – is a regular stretching program. Company leaders and safety personnel can kick off a group stretching program with relatively little effort and time. Pick three or four stretches from the "WorkSmart Dynamic Stretching Program" (link below) and gather your employees for 2 minutes before their shift starts. Walk them through the stretches. Do it every day. In a week or two, pick a few new stretches. That's all there is to it. Did I mention that company leaders and safety personnel need to participate with their employees? I thought so, but a second reminder couldn't hurt.

For employees who complain about discomfort due to repetitive work, including potential carpal tunnel and tendonitis, address the problem in the workplace before calling on your occupational medicine clinic. Many supposed carpal tunnel / tendonitis issues can be brought under control through some simple exercises. Take a look at the "SnakeBite" self-care technique (link below).

Identify employees who may benefit from the SnakeBite technique, then provide direct oversight of to ensure they are actually using the exercise as intended. Enlist the assistance of any on-site medical staff to help hold employees accountable. And follow-through to check that the Snakebite technique is working. You may be very surprised to find that a clinic visit may be unnecessary.

Addressing sprains and strains before they become treatable problems could save your company a load of time and money in mitigated claims. Of course if you do, my doctors may go hungry. But don't let that weigh on your conscience....

Author:

Steve Krob, Methodist Occupational Health & Wellness, (515) 241-2223, steven.krob@unitypoint.org

Resources:

[Sprains & Strains: Preventing Musculoskeletal Injury through Workplace Design](#)

[Snakebite AWAY Carpal Tunnel & Tendonitis](#)

[WorkSmart Dynamic Stretching Plan Poster](#)