WORK ABILITY MAINTENANCE FOR WORKERS WHO PERFORM REPETITIVE UPPER BODY MOVEMENTS

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What is ‘Work Ability’?

Work ability is a worker’s ability to be healthy and productive in the workplace. The ability for a worker to be productive is tied to their health and to their functional capacity. Unique physical and psychosocial loading factors of a specific occupation affect work ability as does the individual characteristics of a worker.

What are these physical and psychosocial loading factors?

Physical loading factors include:
- Lifting heavy items
- Repetitive movements
- Working in awkward positions
- Sitting down for prolonged periods of time

Psychosocial loading factors include:
- Excessive workloads
- Lack of involvement
- Lack of support
- High job pressure

What are the symptoms?

Possible symptoms arising from these loading factors are low back pain, neck pain and shoulder pain.
Who is affected?

Approximately 1/5 adults in Finland suffer from musculoskeletal pain. Out of people with pain, 35% have low back pain, 30% have neck pain and 20% have shoulder pain.

What can I do as an employee?

According to Finnish Law, it is the employee’s responsibility to provide work health care. If you are suffering from neck or shoulder pain, consult a health care professional!

It is recommended to stand up for 2-3 minutes after every 30 minutes of sitting down. Try standing as often as possible! The symptoms of a sedentary life are a higher rate of mortality, heart disease, diabetes, higher body mass index (BMI) and pain.

Workplace and home exercises have been shown to decrease pain and maintain work ability. This can be achieved by exercising for 2-12 minutes during your work break. Please consult a health care professional before performing a work or home exercise routine.
What are the general health recommendations?

To maintain work ability it is important to maintain your general health. For all healthy adults aged 18 to 65 years of age need moderate intensity aerobic physical activity for at least 30 minutes on five days of every week. Moderate intensity aerobic physical can include walking at a brisk pace. Another possibility is to perform vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 20 minutes on three days of every week. An example of this is jogging, where your breathing and heart rate are increased. The minimum requirements can also be fulfilled by a combination of the two activities.

On top of the aerobic physical activity, it is required to perform exercises that increase muscular strength two days every week. Following the minimum requirements reduces the risk for musculoskeletal diseases, chronic diseases and unhealthy weight gain.
What can I do as an employer?

Employers should promote healthy ways of living to their employees. Healthier employees also means that the company can become more attractive to other possible employees. The benefits of healthy employees are lower costs due to sick leave days, higher productivity and happier employees who have higher job satisfaction. This also includes a decrease in work accidents and diseases.

When an employee is on sick leave due to the loading factors in work, it is important for the employer to contact them. This creates a positive message to the employee and shows that they are appreciated in the work place. This type of messaging can also increase the motivation both to work, and to return to work.

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