



WORKSMART SOLUTIONS, PC

An Employer's Guide to **Early Intervention**

Preventing an ache from becoming a pain is an important strategy in the workplace. What is your reaction to the following statements from workers?

- "My arm just feels heavy after doing this job."
- "My back is getting worse. I may need to see a doctor."
- "My shoulder only hurts if I lift something heavy or the wrong way."
- "My elbow only hurts when I grip things really hard."
- "I get numbness and tingling in my fingers. It seems to be getting worse."
- "I'm used to the pain - I'm just getting older these days."
- "I think I pinched something in my neck and need to go home."
- "It hurts whether I'm working or at home. I'm not sure what is causing it."
- "It's not that bad - I'll just deal with it for now."
- "It's not bad enough for me to see the doctor... yet."

The list of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) that correlate to these statements could include anything from a sprain or strain injury to more severe conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome or a rotator cuff tear. Billions of dollars (yes, **BILLIONS \$\$\$**) are spent annually by employers to treat musculoskeletal conditions. From a safety performance standpoint, MSDs are typically both the highest injury and cost category for employers. Studies also show that musculoskeletal conditions are one of the top three costs for an employer's group health plan.

Musculoskeletal disorders are the most common conditions that qualify for Social Security Disability.

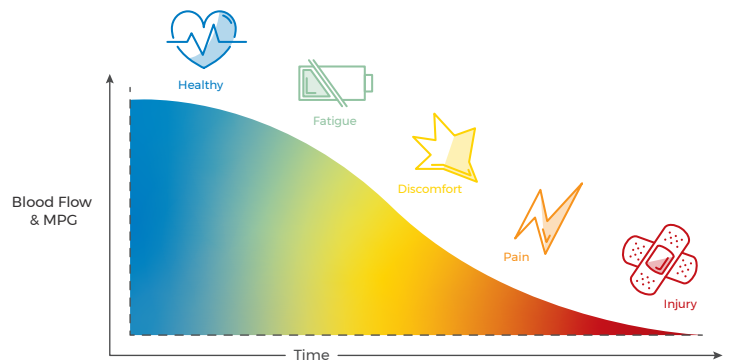


Traditional medical management of soft-tissue injuries often becomes complex, especially given the dysfunctional nature of the workers comp and disability systems. The result can feel like being on a wild roller coaster ride that involves multiple players (physicians, case managers, insurance adjusters, therapists, chiropractors, and even attorneys). The ability to control the outcome can be lost once the employee leaves the workplace. Many workers who are experiencing “pain” believe they are working “safe” until the pain they experience interferes with their ability to work. It’s at this point that they speak up or seek medical care – which is like going in for an oil change when there is smoke coming out of the engine. **Here’s where Early Intervention is a game changer!**

MSD Early Warning Signs

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) develop over time. Rarely are they the result of a single, one-time incident. Rather, they are cumulative in nature – resulting from repeated exposure of various risk factors over an extended period. The early warning signs of MSDs are usually present long before the employees experience a level of pain and/or loss of function that requires medical treatment beyond first aid interventions. Early warning signs of an MSD include reports of discomfort, achiness, soreness, stiffness, and intermittent tingling/numbness.

The progression to an MSD follows this path –



MSDs are Multifactorial in Nature

Identifying the root cause of an MSD is often a mystery. Workers often find it difficult to identify a specific task or activity that “caused” their pain. There are many factors that lead to the development of an ache or pain for a worker. These include:

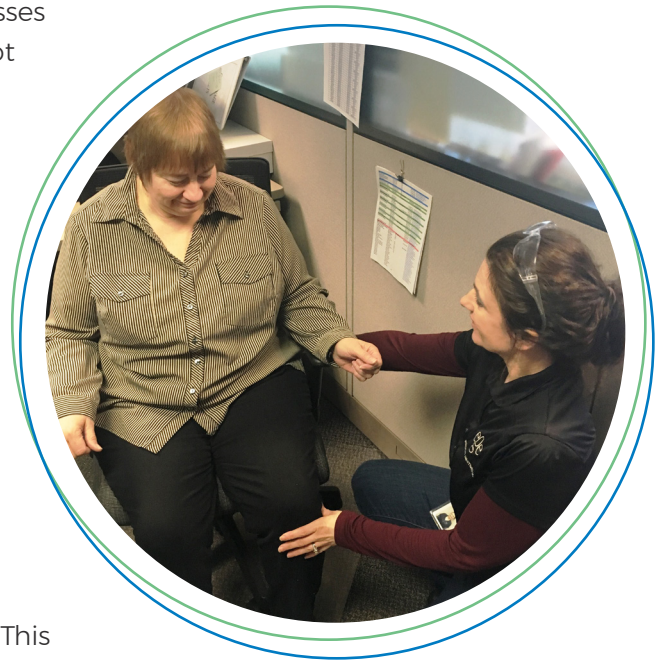


- Home activities
- Hobbies
- Age
- Gender
- Medical History
- Worker Habits
 - » Posture
 - » Body Mechanics
 - » Wellness
- Worker capabilities
- Supervisor Relationship
- Job Demands
 - » Forceful Exertion(s)
 - » Awkward Posture(s)
 - » Repetitive Motions
- Job Design (Ergonomics)
- Body Mechanics/Technique
- Physical Capacity vs Job Demand
- Insufficient Muscle Recovery Time

ACCESS THE ONSITE ADVANTAGE

Early Intervention (EI) is a proactive strategy that addresses the early warning signs of MSDs, identifies potential root causes of discomfort, and prevents symptoms from progressing into an injury. The EI model is similar to a sports medicine model where trained specialists are on the field to evaluate and treat athletes during the game. Ege WorkSmart Solutions provides Early Intervention (EI) specialists onsite where the work is occurring.

EI specialists are licensed physical therapists and athletic trainers who have extensive backgrounds in assessing and treating musculoskeletal conditions. EI Specialists are educated in first aid interventions that alleviate symptoms, and more importantly, prevent them from returning. EI Specialists are also trained in human factors, movement, and ergonomics. This expertise is utilized to guide the employee in managing their symptoms and promote a safety in the work environment. Early Intervention is designed to “keep small problems small”. EI reduces the chance of “symptoms” becoming an OSHA recordable injury, resulting in lower workers’ compensation costs. Even when a worker’s symptoms originated from outside the workplace, cost is reduced by addressing symptoms early. The result is a “win-win” for both the employee and the employer.



INCREASES EMPLOYEE AWARENESS

Having a neutral party available to listen, observe, and provide guidance is reassuring to the employee. It sends a powerful message to the employee that “we care”. EI helps the employee to recognize and quickly respond to early symptoms of MSDs when they first appear. EI specialists spend one-on-one time with the employees to help identify ergonomic improvements, promote awareness of posture and body mechanics, and implement effective recovery strategies.

ENCOURAGES EARLY REPORTING AND INTERVENTION: THE TWO-WEEK WINDOW

Early reporting is a key safety performance indicator. Several studies demonstrate that the presence of discomfort in the workplace is a precursor to an eventual recordable injury. **Ninety-eight percent of employees seen in the EI program achieve full resolution of their symptoms when they present to the EI program within the two weeks of first experiencing symptoms.** The longer the symptoms are not addressed, the greater the chance an “ache” will become a recordable injury. Employees are encouraged to report symptoms early to their supervisors, human resources, or health/safety manager. This prompts an EI specialist to get involved in the process. The EI program encourages a work culture of early reporting and teamwork to address all the factors that may lead to an MSD. A two-week window is often utilized as a leading indicator by employers in their health and safety metrics.



CREATES A PROACTIVE CULTURE

Many employers operate from a reactive approach to MSDs. Workers are often hesitant to report minor symptoms or may be fearful of reprisal. Some workers see “pain and soreness” as a sign of weakness, while others see it as a badge of courage. Supervisors experience frustration trying to balance production demands with safety. Safety managers are spread thin to address myriad of health and safety aspects in a work environment. Reacting to issues and putting out fires becomes the status quo, which often leads to negative consequences that include recordable injuries, higher workers compensation costs, and extended lost/restricted work time and disability.

Worst case scenario - a life could be changed forever if a condition is not addressed at the earliest possible opportunity. EI is a catalyst for fueling a proactive approach in addressing musculoskeletal health. EI promotes employee awareness and engagement in the safety process at all levels. The EI process also uncovers ergonomic and training opportunities. The result is not only reduced safety incidents, but improvements in quality and productivity as well. Let's face it: A healthy worker is a happy worker - **and a happy worker is a more productive worker.**

FRAMES A STRONG REACTIVE MODEL

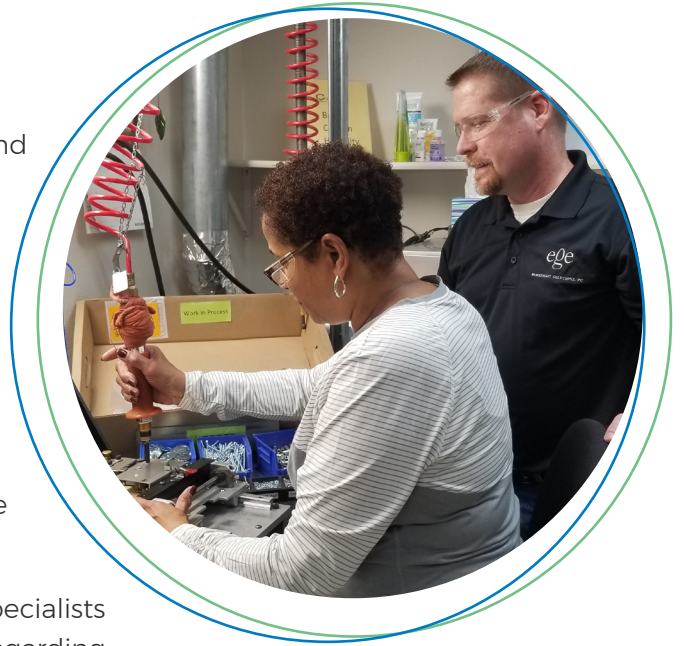
Musculoskeletal symptoms (fatigue, discomfort, pain, and stiffness) are going to happen. While the goal is to prevent injury, an employer must have an effective process to respond quickly to the onset of an employee's reported symptoms. A strong reactive model keeps small problems small. Supervisors should be coached to react positively and quickly to early reports of fatigue and discomfort. The EI specialist should be notified immediately so that they can quickly respond to the worker's report and/or concerns. Many times, employees are the best ergonomists in the facility. EI specialists leverage the expertise of your workers and collaborate with supervisors, engineers, and other personnel to reduce MSD risk factors. This process reduces the guess work in identifying potential underlying factors and facilitates communication between all parties involved.



PROMOTES EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

In studies conducted by Queens School of Business and the Gallup Organization, disengaged workers have 37 percent higher absenteeism, 49 percent more accidents and 60 percent more errors and defects. In contrast, fully engaged workers are committed to their work, safety, and overall success of the company. Engaged workers put in more effort, have a higher quality work product, go out of their way to assist others, have fewer accidents, and are willing to provide feedback and suggestions on ways to increase efficiencies and improve the work environment.

The EI process facilitates employee engagement. EI specialists conduct one-on-one consultations with employees regarding their reported symptoms or concerns. The EI Specialist listens to the worker's concerns and asks questions to gain clarity around the causes of discomfort. From there they discuss the findings with the employee and provide guidance on first aid interventions so the worker can more effectively manage their symptoms at work and at home.



The EI specialist also observes the worker's job tasks, identifies potential ergonomic risk factors, and works with the team to implement appropriate controls (engineering, administrative or PPE). Follow ups occur on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to reassess the employee's symptoms and monitor recommended changes to the job. The early intervention process empowers your employees to become advocates for safety and get them more engaged in the prevention process!

ENABLES COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Effective communication is essential for creating a healthier workforce with a wellness mindset. By nature of their responsibilities, Supervisors and Health & Safety professionals often juggle many tasks at once on any given day. Their plates are full. EI Specialists serve as a conduit of communication between the employee, supervisor, human resources, and safety management. Updates are provided through a reporting process on a regular basis, including identifying levels of concern regarding each case. This allows busy supervisors and safety personnel to prioritize their time and attention with the cases of greater concern. This process positively impacts both teamwork and communication throughout all levels in the organization.



RESULTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES!

A positive, successful safety culture connects everyone in the company around a common goal to measurably reduce near misses and incidents. It goes beyond following safety procedures and rules. Great cultures elicit safety buy-in from employees. Failure to address the early warning signs of musculoskeletal conditions will lead to higher injury rates, increased costs, greater levels of absenteeism, and an overall decrease in productivity – all of which impact an employer’s bottom-line.



EWSS has provided EI services for the past 7 years. Our OSHA recordable cases related to ergonomic issues have decreased over 50%. In addition, ergo-related OSHA recordable cases are no longer the top case types vs other injuries.

Early Intervention is a key strategy that addresses the musculoskeletal health of a workforce. EI allows workers to go home healthy and happy so they can enjoy their lives. The results speak for themselves.

See just a few comments the clients of Ege WorkSmart Solutions (EWSS) –



“EWSS’ ergonomic training helped us gain the tools required to identify tasks/processes with a possible negative effect and gained the ability to put cost effective solutions in place”.



“We estimate a **6:1 RETURN** on our investment since partnering with EWSS and EI. Our employees clearly get the “we care” message. Our employee engagement in health and safety is the highest its ever been in the history of our company”.



“Engaging employees with the SIO, EI, and awareness training to gain their buy in that the programs really work and once again shows our team members our commitment to their overall health and safety”.

