

Establishing a stretching program to help reduce injuries

Workplace injuries as a result of sprains, strains, muscular fatigue or other musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are a significant problem for many organizations across all industries.

And, as the workforce continues to age, this problem is likely to get worse. In fact, Bureau of Labor Statistics data from 2006 indicate:

- MSDs account for 30 percent of the injuries and illnesses involving days away from work.
- Four out of ten cases with days away from work were due to sprains or strains – with nine days being the median days away from work.
- Strains and sprains were the leading cause of injury and illness in every major industry sector.
- **Circulation** – which speeds healing/recovery after muscle injuries.
- **Flexibility** – flexible muscles can improve your daily performance. Tasks such as lifting, bending, reaching, stooping and pushing/pulling become easier to perform.
- **Morale** – many employers find that stretching programs actually help with employee morale by providing a healthy and fun activity in the workplace.
- **Stress levels** – stretching relaxes the tense muscles that often accompany stress.

What can you do to help your employees minimize their risks?

Poor body mechanics, lifting, awkward postures, repetitive motion, material handling, climate and even noise can lead to MSDs. To minimize some of these risks, numerous leading health experts promote stretching. Elite athletes, military personnel – even cats and dogs – stretch.

What's more, companies who have implemented such programs have found that stretching 3-5 days a week helps improve:

- **Range of motion** – which facilitates better balance and enables employees to stay mobile and less prone to injury.
- **Posture** – which minimizes fatigue that can lead to aches and pains.

In addition, preparing your muscles and joints for activity can protect you from injury.

Shaping up your program

Zurich Services Corporation's absence management consultants can help you develop and implement a customized stretching program to meet your company's needs.

A consultant will come to your workplace to observe your employees at work, in addition to analyzing your loss history, in order to identify specific muscle groups to target when designing your customized stretching program.

For more information,
e-mail us at
absencemanagement
@zurichna.com
or call **800-982-5964**

A stretching program typically contains the following elements:

- A library of customized stretches and photographs of your employees demonstrating each of these stretches
- Five-to-seven minute stretching regimens designed around your company's needs.
- Train-the-trainer session(s) to discuss the benefits of stretching, stretching essentials, instruction on how to properly perform each of the stretches in the library and conversations regarding how to implement a successful stretching program.

If you have questions, or for more information, e-mail us at absencemanagement@zurichna.com or call 800-982-5964.

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