SPRAINS & STRAINS

In October 2006, Joel Zumaya, a professional baseball player for the Detroit Tigers, missed three playoff games. The reason for the missed games was a repetitive motion forearm strain. You may suspect that the strain was from throwing 100 mph fastballs, but you would be wrong. What was the cause of the strain? Too many video games caused the strain that sidelined this pitcher. Fortunately, there is a happy ending. Joel Zumaya recovered quickly and later pitched in the World Series. If YOU suffer a sprain or strain you may not be as lucky. The pain and missed days of work can have long-lasting effects on you and your company. This training focuses on sprains and strains and how to avoid them.

What is a sprain?
A sprain is a stretch or tear of a ligament. A ligament is the band of fibrous tissue that connects two or more bones at a joint.

What causes sprains?
Sprains usually occur from falls, sudden twisting, and blows to the body that force ligaments to stretch beyond their normal capacity. Common sites for sprains include ankles, knees, and wrists.

What is a strain?
A strain is an injury to the muscle or tendon. Tendons are the fibrous cords of tissue that attach muscles to bones.

What causes strains?
Strains are caused by the twisting or pulling of muscles and tendons. Strains can be acute or chronic. Acute strains are associated with a specific event or injury, such as, trying to lift something too heavy. Chronic strains occur over time from the overuse of muscles and repetitious motions; such as, bending down continuously or too many video games.

Multiple Causes
Keep in mind that almost all injuries including sprains and strains have many contributing factors. For instance, someone who strains his/her back while lifting a box may not recognize the other possible contributing factors to the injury. Other causes for that back injury might include awkward posture, previous forceful lifts, current physical condition, muscle fatigue, repetitive motion, lack of awareness and training, and insufficient warm-up. These and other factors need to be considered in the discussion of how to prevent strains and sprains.

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Preventing Sprains and Strains

There are several ways to avoid sprains and strains. One of the most widely used is warming up and stretching muscles. Muscles, joints, tendons, and ligaments are more flexible when they are warm. Stretching will not be an effective measure if performed while the body is cold – so warm up your muscles before stretching. The strength and flexibility that you build will help prevent strains and sprains.

Current Health

What is the current condition of your body? If you are in shape, eating well, and exercising, you will be less likely to sustain sprains and strains. An awkward posture, repetitive motion, extended periods of labor, and intense work with no breaks can leave your body in a weakened state and vulnerable to strain and sprains. You need to recognize hazardous situations and take steps to reduce the risk of injury. For example, the risk of straining your back when moving boxes from point A to point B is greatly reduced when you use a dolly or team lifting.

Take a moment to try and identify the sprain and strain hazards you face each day. What steps can you take to reduce or eliminate these hazards? Make a plan with your co-workers and supervisors to address the sprain and strain hazards that are present in your workplace.

Cal/OSHA Publications:
Safe Lifting Poster -http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/liftingSafer.pdf