



Ergonomic Assist Systems & Equipment

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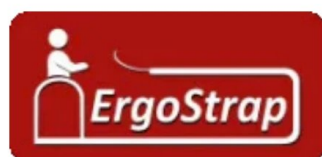
INDUSTRIAL SOLUTIONS FOR BETTER ERGONOMICS

Industrial Ergonomics 101

*An Introduction to Ergonomics in Industrial
and Supply Chain Environments*



EASE Members



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INTRODUCTION

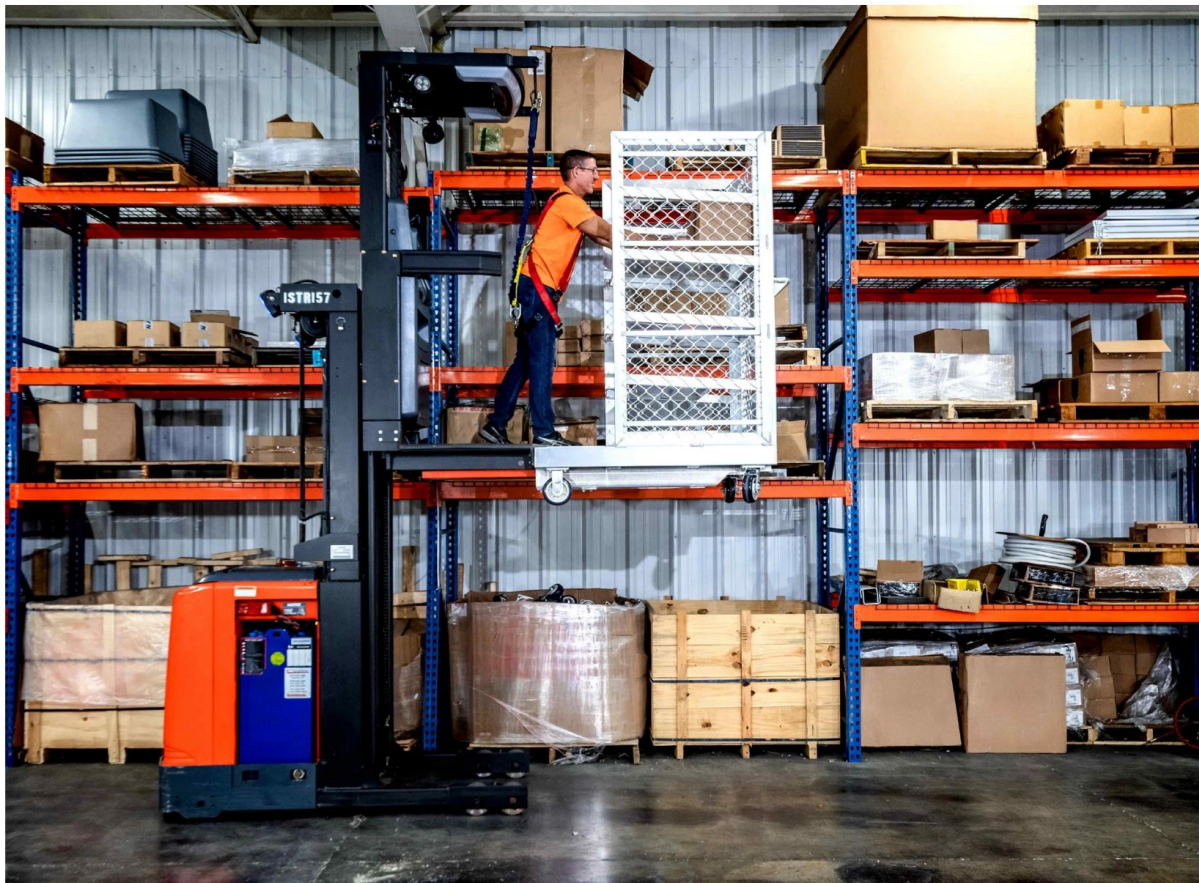
Industrial ergonomics focuses on improving the design of work environments, tasks, and equipment to enhance worker safety, comfort, and productivity in industrial settings. By applying ergonomic principles, manual processes—such as those involved in manufacturing, assembly, and material handling—can be optimized to reduce physical demands, prevent injuries, and ensure the well-being of employees.

This guide—produced by the **Ergonomic Assist Systems & Equipment (EASE) Council**, an MHI industry group—provides an overview of key aspects, applications, and benefits of industrial ergonomics.

What is Ergonomics?

Ergonomics is the design of work systems around the capabilities and limitations of people. By appropriately designing the work process, the physical demands on workers can be reduced as they perform tasks. This, in turn, reduces fatigue, the chance of musculoskeletal injury, employee turnover, and potential work quality issues.

It is important to note, however, that ergonomic initiatives should not be confused with other complementary approaches to preventing musculoskeletal disorders. These include: lifting technique training; exercise and stretching programs; personal protective equipment; and worker selection.



KEY ASPECTS OF INDUSTRIAL ERGONOMICS

Industrial ergonomics applies ergonomic principles and practices to the design of work environments, tools, and systems in industrial applications. It focuses on improving the interaction between workers and their tasks to enhance safety, efficiency, and comfort while reducing the risk of injuries and strain. Industrial ergonomics covers the following key areas:

1. Workstation Design

Workstation design plays a pivotal role in reducing worker discomfort, improving productivity, and preventing injuries. The goal is to create workstations that accommodate both the worker's body and the tasks' requirements. Essential elements of effective workstation design include:

- **Adjustable Height Workbenches:** Workbenches that can be raised or lowered to accommodate different heights and tasks reduce the need for awkward postures and repetitive motions.
- **Tool Placement:** Tools and equipment should be positioned within easy reach to minimize excessive stretching or twisting, which can strain muscles and joints.
- **Equipment Layout:** Locate equipment in a way that allows for smooth transitions and minimizes the need for excessive reaching or bending.
- **Proper Lighting:** Ensure that environment lighting and task lighting are optimized to eliminate glare or shadows. This prevents employees from assuming poor working postures as they attempt to see the task at hand.



2. Tools and Equipment

Ergonomically designed tools and equipment reduce physical strain and enhance efficiency. Where applicable, tools and equipment can incorporate:

- **Ergonomic Handles:** Tools with handles that are designed to fit comfortably in the hand, reducing grip strain and hand fatigue.
- **Vibration Reduction Measures:** Tools and machinery that minimize vibration reduce the risk of hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) and other related injuries.
- **Easy-to-Use Controls:** Equipment should be designed with simple, intuitive controls that minimize awkward hand positions and the need for excessive force.



KEY ASPECTS OF INDUSTRIAL ERGONOMICS

3. Material Handling

Material handling involves moving materials safely and efficiently. Proper ergonomics in this area reduces the need for heavy lifting and awkward movements. Key considerations include:

- **Assistive Lifting and Transport**
Equipment: Use of lifts, conveyors, carts and wheeled equipment, as well as other mechanical aids to move materials reduces strain on workers and minimizes the need for manual lifting.
- **Minimization of Repetitive Motion:**
Designing processes and equipment to limit repetitive lifting or bending motions helps reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries.



4. Work Task Design

Designing work tasks with ergonomics in mind is crucial for reducing fatigue and physical strain. Measures can encompass:

- **Breaking Tasks into Manageable Steps:** Divide tasks into smaller, more manageable components, allowing workers to avoid prolonged or repetitive actions that strain the body.
- **Designing Tasks to Include Varied Movements and Postures:** Encouraging different movements and postures during work helps reduce fatigue and muscle strain. Rotating employees through multiple tasks can also distribute physical loads more evenly.

5. Work Environment

The overall work environment is an essential aspect of ergonomics. Key factors include:

- **Lighting:** Proper lighting reduces eye strain, may improve work posture, and ensures workers can see clearly to perform tasks safely.
- **Noise:** Effective noise control measures prevent hearing damage and reduce stress in noisy environments.
- **Temperature:** Maintaining a comfortable temperature promotes worker comfort, reduces fatigue, and increases productivity.



KEY ASPECTS OF INDUSTRIAL ERGONOMICS

6. Safety and Ergonomics

Ergonomics and safety go hand-in-hand to prevent injuries and create a safe working environment. Critical safety measures include:

- **Machine Guards:** Properly designed machinery guarding helps protect workers from injury by preventing contact with moving parts.
- **Signage and Labels:** Clear safety signs and instructions on equipment help workers follow safe operating procedures.
- **Safety Training:** Educating workers on how to use equipment safely and ergonomically can reduce the risk of injury.

7. Ergonomic Assessments

Regular ergonomic assessments help identify potential risks and areas for improvement. These evaluations encompass:

- **Observing Work Processes:** Evaluate workstations, tasks, and equipment regularly to identify ergonomic hazards. There are several ergonomic assessment tools available online or via apps, such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Lifting Equation, online at [cdc.gov/niosh/ergonomics/about/RNLE.html](https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/ergonomics/about/RNLE.html).
- **Collecting Feedback:** Solicit and listen to worker input regarding pain, discomfort, and the effectiveness of ergonomic solutions to help guide improvements.
- **Adopting a Continuous Improvement Process:** Make interventions or work adjustments based on ergonomic assessments that are continually repeated to improve the work environment.

8. Training and Education

Education is an important component of successfully implementing ergonomic solutions. It should incorporate:

- **Teaching Workers How to Use Interventions:** Show workers how to effectively operate and use ergonomic solutions to facilitate their adoption.
- **Providing Ergonomics Awareness Training:** Educate all workers about basic ergonomic principles—such as the value of improved work postures—and about your organization's ergonomics initiatives. These measures can improve communication and worker utilization of ergonomic changes.
- **Educating Key Leaders About Ergonomics:** Ensure that persons responsible for developing and implementing ergonomic practices are up-to-date on the latest ergonomics information and solutions.



WHICH AREAS OF MANUFACTURING AND SUPPLY CHAIN BENEFIT FROM INDUSTRIAL ERGONOMICS?

Industrial ergonomics has a far-reaching impact across various sectors throughout manufacturing and the supply chain. By improving worker safety, comfort, and efficiency, ergonomic solutions not only benefit individual workers but also optimize key operational areas. The following explores how different areas within manufacturing and supply chain specifically benefit from improved ergonomics:

1. Production Lines and Assembly Areas

In manufacturing, production lines and assembly areas are often fast-paced and require workers to perform repetitive motions or handle heavy materials. Ergonomics can help by:

- **Reducing Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs):** Ergonomic workstations, adjustable height work surfaces, and varied task designs help reduce the repetitive motions that lead to musculoskeletal disorders. These include carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, and lower back disorders.
- **Improving Worker Efficiency:** Ergonomically designed workstations and tools allow employees to complete tasks with greater precision and less physical effort, leading to increased production output.
- **Enhancing Worker Comfort:** Proper posture support, adjustable seating, floor matting, and optimally placed tools reduce discomfort and fatigue. This helps workers stay focused and productive throughout their shifts.



2. Material Handling and Warehousing

The warehousing and material handling sectors are integral to supply chains, often requiring employees to lift, carry, or transport heavy loads. Improved ergonomics can significantly benefit these activities by:

- **Minimizing Manual Lifting:** The use of automated lifts, conveyors, and mechanical aids—such as tuggers, carts, pallet jacks, and forklifts—can reduce the need for workers to lift and carry heavy items manually, decreasing the risk of back injuries.

WHICH AREAS OF MANUFACTURING AND SUPPLY CHAIN BENEFIT FROM INDUSTRIAL ERGONOMICS?

- **Reducing Awkward Movements:** Properly designed storage systems, adjustable shelving, and ergonomic lifting devices lessen the need for employees to bend, twist, or reach excessively. This equipment reduces the stresses experienced by the musculoskeletal system when handling materials.
- **Optimizing Storage Layouts:** Strategic placement of materials, tools, and equipment eliminates unnecessary movement. It also ensures that workers can efficiently access items without straining or overexerting themselves.



3. Packaging and Sorting

In packaging and sorting operations, workers often perform tasks that require precision, repetitive motions, and handling of heavy boxes or products. Ergonomics can be a game changer here by:

- **Improving Task Efficiency:** Ergonomically optimized packaging workstations and sorting systems reduce physical strain and allow workers to complete tasks with greater speed and accuracy.
- **Preventing Fatigue:** Well-designed—and when applicable—adjustable workstations, ensure that employees do not experience excessive fatigue from repetitive tasks or prolonged standing. This can lead to fewer mistakes and higher quality control.
- **Supporting Comfortable Posture:** Ergonomically designed packaging tables, floor matting, adjustable conveyors, and ergonomic tools ensure that workers can maintain a neutral posture and avoid discomfort during long shifts.

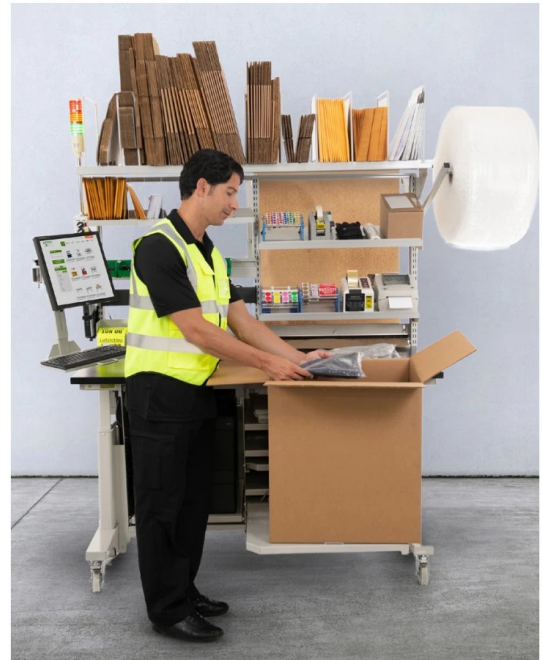


WHICH AREAS OF MANUFACTURING AND SUPPLY CHAIN BENEFIT FROM INDUSTRIAL ERGONOMICS?

4. Shipping and Receiving

In the shipping and receiving areas, where workers often handle large volumes of goods and prepare them for transport, ergonomic improvements can benefit in several ways:

- **Reducing Lifting and Bending:** With the implementation of ergonomic material handling equipment like lifts, trolleys, and adjustable height platforms, workers can move and stack packages more efficiently, minimizing the need to bend or lift heavy loads.
- **Enhancing Handling Efficiency:** Ergonomically placed packaging, items, and tools streamline the workflow, allowing employees to complete their tasks faster and with less physical exertion.
- **Promoting Worker Safety:** By ensuring that handling processes follow ergonomic guidelines, companies can reduce injury rates related to repetitive motion, heavy lifting, or improper handling.



5. Maintenance and Equipment Handling

In manufacturing plants, maintenance workers are responsible for keeping equipment running smoothly. The physical nature of their work can lead to strain and injury if proper ergonomics are not in place. Benefits include:

- **Improving Access to Equipment:** Ergonomically designed work areas with adjustable platforms or tool storage systems reduce the need for awkward postures when accessing machinery for maintenance or repair.
- **Minimizing Physical Strain:** Ergonomic hand tools, vibration-reducing gloves, and the strategic placement of tools help reduce strain on workers' hands, wrists, and arms during repairs and maintenance.
- **Decreasing Fatigue:** Proper ergonomics in maintenance areas allow employees to perform tasks with greater ease, reducing the mental and physical fatigue associated with prolonged awkward postures and/or equipment handling.



WHICH AREAS OF MANUFACTURING AND SUPPLY CHAIN BENEFIT FROM INDUSTRIAL ERGONOMICS?

6. Supply Chain Management and Logistics

Particularly in high-demand environments—like distribution centers or freight operations—improved ergonomics can benefit logistics teams by streamlining processes and reducing the risk of injury by:

- **Optimizing Movement Flow:** By designing efficient workflows that minimize unnecessary movement, logistics managers can reduce the physical strain on employees and increase overall operational efficiency.
- **Reducing Stress from Manual Handling:** Mechanical aids—such as powered trolleys and automated sorting systems—reduce the physical strain associated with handling and transporting goods through a facility.
- **Promoting Well-Being:** Ergonomic improvements to office spaces and control centers—such as height-adjustable desks and supportive seating—allow logistics personnel to work comfortably, even in fast-paced, high-stress roles.



7. Quality Control and Inspection Areas

In quality control and inspection departments, workers often spend long hours performing detailed checks on products. Ergonomics plays an important role by:

- **Reducing Eye and Neck Strain:** Proper lighting, adjustable height workstations, and ergonomic chairs reduce strain on the eyes and improve work postures. This makes it easier for employees to focus on quality checks for extended periods.
- **Supporting Comfortable Posture:** Adjustable stools, magnification equipment, and ergonomic tools support a neutral posture, reducing discomfort during repetitive inspection tasks.
- **Improving Accuracy:** With the right ergonomic setup, workers are able to perform tasks more accurately and without the distraction of physical discomfort. This can result in higher product quality and fewer errors.

KEY BENEFITS OF IMPROVED INDUSTRIAL ERGONOMICS

Industrial ergonomics benefits multiple areas within manufacturing and the supply chain, from production lines to warehousing, shipping, and quality control. By addressing the physical demands of tasks through ergonomic solutions, companies can reduce the risk of injury, improve productivity, and ensure the long-term health and well-being of their workforce.

Whether it's optimizing workstations, implementing mechanical aids, or creating safer workflows, ergonomics plays a vital role in driving operational efficiency and enhancing overall business performance through:

1. Lower Injury Rates

By implementing ergonomic practices, the risks of musculoskeletal disorders, repetitive strain injuries, and other work-related injuries can be significantly reduced. Proper workstation design, task rotation, and ergonomic tools help workers maintain proper posture and reduce strain on their bodies.



2. Increased Productivity

Comfortable workers are more productive. When workers experience less discomfort and fatigue, they are able to focus more on their tasks, leading to improved job performance and greater efficiency.



3. Enhanced Worker Satisfaction

A well-designed ergonomic environment enhances worker satisfaction and morale. When workers feel safe and comfortable, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated in their work. This, in turn, creates a positive workplace culture which frequently encourages higher retention within an organization.

4. Higher Cost Savings

Implementing ergonomics leads to significant cost savings in the long run. Lower fatigue and fewer injuries translate to decreased healthcare costs, less absenteeism, reduced turnover, and shorter downtime. Additionally, improved efficiency and productivity contribute to overall business profitability.



HOW TO IMPROVE ERONOMICS IN INDUSTRIAL SETTINGS

Improving ergonomics in industrial settings is a continuous, proactive, systematic, and collaborative effort. It involves assessing risks and developing ergonomic solutions that include redesigning workspaces, adopting ergonomic tools and equipment, and fostering a culture of worker involvement.

By focusing on workstation design, task variety, mechanical aids, and education, companies can significantly reduce the risk of injury, reduce employee turnover, increase productivity, and improve overall employee satisfaction. The following proactive measures can create safer, more comfortable, and more efficient work environments that benefit both workers and the organization.



1. Encourage Worker Involvement and Feedback

Employees are the best source of information about ergonomic hazards and solutions in their environment. Actively involve them in the process by:

- **Conducting Surveys:** Gather feedback regularly by surveying employees on ergonomics-related issues and potential improvements.
- **Establishing Communication Channels:** Create open lines of communication between workers and management, allowing employees to report discomfort, suggest improvements, or request changes to their work environment.
- **Engaging Workers in the Solution Development Process:** Involve workers in brainstorming ergonomic solutions for their specific tasks. Giving them input during the design and implementation process ensures that the solutions are useful, usable, and desirable.

HOW TO IMPROVE ERGONOMICS IN INDUSTRIAL SETTINGS

2. Conduct Ergonomic Assessments Regularly

Another key step in improving ergonomics is conducting a thorough ergonomic assessment of the work environment. This evaluation helps identify potential risks, inefficiencies, and areas where improvements can be made. Additionally, regularly reassess the workspace to verify that any changes or improvements continue to address ergonomic needs. This is particularly important when alterations to work tasks occur due to changes in the materials handled, product design, or work process. Key elements to examine include:

- **Workstation Layout:** Evaluate the design and setup of workstations to identify awkward postures or excessive reaching that can lead to strain.
- **Tools and Equipment:** Assess whether tools are ergonomically designed, easy to use, and positioned in ways that reduce the need for excessive force or uncomfortable hand or shoulder positions.
- **Material Handling:** Examine the processes and equipment in performing lifting, moving, or carrying tasks to determine whether they could be contributing to musculoskeletal injury.
- **Work Task Design:** Analyze the nature of tasks being performed to determine if they involve repetitive movements, heavy lifting, or awkward postures that can lead to fatigue or injury.



3. Design Workstations for Comfort and Flexibility

Workstations should be designed to fit the needs of the workers performing the tasks. Focus on making workstations adjustable and adaptable for various tasks and workers. Consider deploying the following:

- **Adjustable Height Surfaces:** Incorporate adjustable-height workbenches, tables, and stools to accommodate different body types and allow workers to alternate between standing and sitting.
- **Efficient Tool Placement:** Place frequently used tools and equipment within easy reach to minimize bending, twisting, or excessive reaching. Tools should be positioned so workers can maintain neutral and comfortable body positions. Consider both vertical and horizontal reach zones.
- **Proper Lighting:** Review environment lighting in the room as well as overhead lighting on the workstation. Add task-specific lights if the work requires detailed handling.
- **Ergonomic Chairs or Stools:** Add seating that supports proper posture—such as chairs with lumbar support and adjustable features—for sitting workers.
- **Comfortable Standing Surfaces:** Provide cushioning surfaces, like floor matting, for employees who must stand for long periods, or footwear that provides cushioned support.

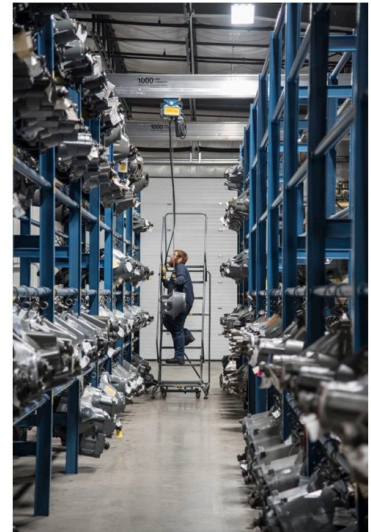


HOW TO IMPROVE ERONOMICS IN INDUSTRIAL SETTINGS

4. Use Ergonomically Designed Tools and Equipment

Invest in tools and machinery that are specifically designed to reduce strain and improve user comfort. Look for these key features:

- **Ergonomic Handles:** Choose tools with grips that fit comfortably in the hand, reducing stress on the fingers, wrists, and forearms. Non-slip materials and contoured handles can also improve comfort. Note that handle orientation may also affect shoulder postures.
- **Vibration Reduction:** Select equipment that minimizes vibration, particularly handheld tools or machinery that may lead to hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS). Look for vibration-dampening features or padded handles.
- **Simplified Controls:** Ensure machinery and equipment have easy-to-use controls that minimize awkward wrist and hand movements, preventing repetitive strain injuries.



5. Integrate Mechanical Aids for Material Handling

Mechanical aids can significantly reduce physical strain by automating or assisting with heavy lifting and material movement. These aids also increase safety and efficiency in the workplace. Consider deploying the following equipment:

- **Overhead Lifts and Hoists:** Use lifts, hoists, or cranes to lift and transport heavy objects, reducing the need for workers to perform manual lifting.
- **Conveyors:** Implement conveyors and rollers to move materials across different areas of the workspace, minimizing the need for workers to carry, push, or drag materials over long distances.
- **Pallet Jacks, Tuggers, and Carts:** Provide workers with powered pallet jacks, tuggers, or carts to move materials safely and efficiently, reducing strain.
- **Work Positioners:** Utilize systems that support and elevate a load from underneath, including lift tables, pallet positioners, tilters, and stackers. These devices minimize the need for employees to bend and reach.



HOW TO IMPROVE ERONOMICS IN INDUSTRIAL SETTINGS

6. Implement Task Rotation and Rest Breaks

Repetitive tasks or long periods of static posture can cause fatigue and increase the risk of musculoskeletal disorders. Task rotation and scheduled rest breaks can help alleviate these issues. Here's how to implement these measures:

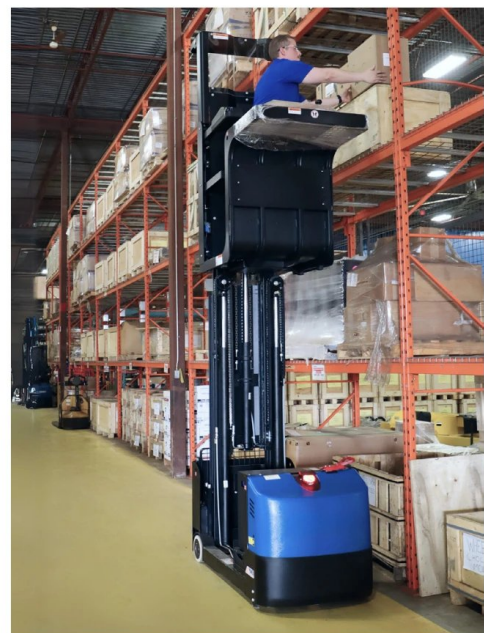
- **Task Rotation:** Design work schedules that rotate employees through different tasks, allowing them to vary their movements and postures throughout their workday. This can prevent overuse injuries caused by repetitive motions and ensure that workers' muscles don't become fatigued.
- **Rest Breaks:** Schedule regular rest breaks to allow workers to recover and stretch. This gives them time to rest their muscles and relax their joints, preventing long-term strain.



7. Improve the Work Environment

The work environment plays a critical role in supporting ergonomics. Address factors such as lighting, noise, and temperature to create a more comfortable workspace that enhances focus and reduces stress:

- **Proper Lighting:** Ensure that work areas are well-lit with appropriate lighting that reduces glare, eye strain, and postural fatigue. Adjustable lighting can help workers focus on tasks more effectively.
- **Noise Control:** Install noise-dampening materials or provide equipment—such as earplugs, earmuffs, or sound barriers—in noisy work areas. Prolonged exposure to high noise levels can contribute to hearing loss and increased stress.
- **Temperature Control:** Maintain a comfortable ambient temperature within the work environment. Too much heat or cold can lead to discomfort, fatigue, and reduced performance. Consider installing climate control systems or fans to regulate the temperature.



HOW TO IMPROVE ERONOMICS IN INDUSTRIAL SETTINGS

8. Provide Ergonomics Training and Education

Training workers on proper ergonomics practices is essential for ensuring that they use equipment, tools, and techniques safely and efficiently. Educational initiatives should focus on:

- **Ergonomic Awareness:** Educate employees on the benefits of implemented ergonomics interventions. Specifically, explain to workers how they will directly benefit from properly using provided ergonomic equipment and techniques.
- **Posture Awareness:** Teach workers how to maintain proper posture when sitting or standing, particularly for tasks that involve prolonged periods of physical activity.
- **Ergonomic Best Practices:** Offer ongoing education on ergonomic principles, such as correct tool usage, better work methods, workstation adjustments, and taking breaks. Encourage workers to report discomfort and provide feedback on ergonomic issues.
- **Proper Lifting Techniques:** While not ergonomics, teaching better lifting techniques can complement your ergonomics initiatives. Instruct employees on how to lift items properly to prevent back strain and other injuries. Emphasize the importance of minimizing reach distances, bending at the knees, using leg strength, and stepping to avoid twisting motions when lifting.



CONCLUSION: LEVERAGE THE ERGONOMICS EXPERTISE OF THE EASE COUNCIL

Industrial ergonomics is crucial for improving safety, comfort, and productivity in the workplace. By focusing on ergonomic task design, tools, material handling, and work environment, companies can create a more efficient, healthier, and safer workplace for their employees. Investing in ergonomics not only reduces injury rates but also enhances worker satisfaction, increases productivity, and delivers long-term cost savings.

For guidance on enhancing the ergonomics within your industrial or supply chain operation, connect with the members of the Ergonomic Assist Systems & Equipment (EASE) Council. As a trusted resource for industrial ergonomics, EASE Council members offer expert guidance and tailored solutions that help you create a safer and more productive environment for your employees. Visit mhi.org/ease for resources, including case studies, equipment photos, and an ergonomics training course.

Team of Experts



EASE [Ergonomic Assist Systems & Equipment]

Ergonomics is more than a buzzword today - it is a movement. Nationally, our demographics confirm we are aging and in deteriorating physical shape. This impacts the workplace, and good employers must think of their businesses in terms of ergonomics. EASE is the group within MHI focused solely on making work easier for people by improving the work environment.

Vision

Establish the EASE brand as the definitive source for industrial ergonomics information.

Mission

To be the authoritative resource for industrial ergonomics.

EASE members meet regularly to:

- Develop and promote guidelines and standards for the practice of good ergonomics in the work place.
- Prepare and distribute educational and promotional materials.
- Collect and disseminate reliable industry statistics.
- Engages and collaborates with NIOSH and the academic community to enrich the group and enhance presentations and training materials.

CONCLUSION: LEVERAGE THE ERGONOMICS EXPERTISE OF THE EASE COUNCIL



The Industry That Makes Supply Chains Work

MHI is the nation's largest material handling, logistics and supply chain association. MHI offers education, networking, and solution sourcing for members, their customers and the industry as a whole through programming and events.

Vision

To be the authoritative resource for the material handling industry.

Mission

Deliver member value every day.

MHI Snapshot

- Over 1,000 members including: material handling and logistics equipment companies, systems and software manufacturers; consultants; systems integrators and simulators; and third-party logistics providers and publishers.
- 18 MHI Industry Groups represent the leading providers in several key equipment and system solution categories.
- Sponsor of the industry-leading ProMat and MODEX events.
- MHI provides educational, development, networking and solution sourcing opportunities.



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