



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Helping Senior Employees

As the work force gets older; professionals who study workplace safety should pay more attention to the unique health risks that older employees face on the job.

Preventing injury is critical to maintaining a healthy workforce (and a healthy corporate bottom line). HR professionals can take some proactive steps to make the workplace safer and healthier for older employees. According to Michael Weinper, M.P.H., P.T., a physical therapist and co-founder of PTPN, the US's largest network of outpatient rehabilitation services, these can benefit employees of any age.

- Adapt job duties to accommodate age-related conditions such as reduced muscle strength and motion. Older employees may have to avoid heavy lifting or share jobs that require strength and flexibility. A job-rotation schedule will prevent overworking body parts, especially for older employees, who may fatigue faster and take longer to recover.
- Make sure that employees have ergonomically designed work environments and equipment. An ergonomically correct work area keeps the body in a comfortable position that enhances efficiency while avoiding injuries caused by awkward, prolonged movements.
- Implement diagnostic and training programs (including post-offer and pre-placement exams for new employees) to prevent specific conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome and tendonitis. Some companies, for example, require employees to attend a "back school" as part of their injury-prevention programs.
- Invite health-care providers to lecture on wellness and age-related topics such as arthritis, hearing loss, nutrition, weight control, cessation of smoking, and drinking. Instituting stretch/walk breaks in addition to the lectures will teach employees simple yet effective ways of reducing long-term physical and psychological stresses that can lead to injury.
- Choose health plans that permit employees to consult practitioners from different disciplines, including physical and occupational therapists. Complementary therapies give workers alternatives to drugs and treatments that may have significant side effects. Older employees can have stronger reactions to medications that can cause drowsiness, confusion, and slowed response time, affecting their performance.