

# YOUTH ON THE JOB

## #4 RSIs Sticks & Stones Can Break Your Bones, but RSIs Can Really Hurt You

### What are Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs)?

Repetitive strain injuries, or RSIs, are work-related injuries that result from overuse of muscles, tendons, ligaments and nerves. They most often affect the upper body – back, wrist, shoulder, elbow, neck and hands. Workers can also get knee injuries due to repetitive strain. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome is an RSI.

According to the AFL-CIO Dept of Occupational Safety & Health, 33 out of 100 (1/3) injuries that disable workers are caused by RSIs.

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RSIs have been around for as long as people have been working. Here are some other names of injuries that workers created before anyone knew what an RSI was.

### RSIs – AKA

- @ Carpenter’s Elbow
- @ Carpet Layer’s Knee
- @ Cherry Pitter’s Thumb
- @ Trigger Finger
- @ Writer’s Cramp
- @ Manure Shoveler’s Hip
- @ Cotton Twister’s Hand
- @ Cymbal Player’s Shoulder
- @ Washerwoman’s Sprain
- @ Stitcher’s Wrist

@ and: Oh, My Aching Back!

### What are the causes of RSIs?

RSIs are caused by working conditions such as:

- ! Constant repetition of the same movement
- ! Working in an awkward and uncomfortable position
- ! Poorly designed equipment and furniture
- ! Working too fast
- ! No rest or breaks

RSIs usually happen because of poor job design — lack of proper equipment and/or tools, inadequate supervision and minimal training can lead to RSIs. Whether you work in an office, a factory, a hospital or a store, be sure to request proper tools to do your work!

### How to Stop RSIs

For every job there will be specific solutions, but here are some general basic tips for everyone:

- ! Ask your boss for proper workstation design, or ergonomically correct equipment that helps prevent injuries
- ! Avoid awkward positions ! Vary your tasks
- ! Take frequent mini-breaks! Slow down
- ! ORGANIZE (see below)

### How to Organize to Prevent RSIs

**1. Survey your co-workers.** Survey your co-workers to find out how many people have RSIs and how serious they are.

**2. Survey your workplace.** Check out what equipment and furniture may be needed to prevent RSIs. Be sure to get the help of co-workers and keep them informed and involved.

### 3. Educate your supervisors and co-workers.

Workers and supervisors need to receive training on the following:

- # identifying symptoms of RSIs
- # potential hazards of different kinds of work
- # proper work station design
- # good posture for working on a computer or other machinery or equipment
- # exercises to reduce muscle strain and tension

### 4. Contact groups that work on RSI issues.

In New York State, groups such as NYCOSH conduct RSI training and provide services to working people. They can put you in touch with unions and other support groups that are actively providing services and working to prevent RSIs.



Continued on back

# Are You at Risk for RSIs?

There are risks on almost every job. Take a look at the chart below:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Computer Users/Typists</b>            | hand and wrist injuries from repeating the same motions on the keyboard and/or gripping the mouse and sitting in awkward positions |
| <b>Hospital Workers/Nurses Aides</b>     | back injuries from repeated lifting of patients, trays and laundry   |
| <b>Cashiers</b>                          | wrist, elbow and shoulder injuries from scanning items repeatedly and from working the cash register                               |
| <b>Stock Handlers</b>                    | back injuries from repeated lifting of heavy items   |
| <b>Assembly Line and Factory Workers</b> | arm and shoulder injuries from repeating the same motions all day  |
| <b>Construction Workers/Laborers</b>     | back, shoulder, neck and arm injuries from repeated lifting, hammering, drilling, sawing, and doing work over your head            |



# Working 9 to 5

If you're working in an office at a computer, you need an **adjustable work station**—you should be able to adjust the height of your keyboard and desk, and you should have an adjustable chair that supports your back. And, it also helps to have the right typing technique.

## DON'T:

- Ⓧ Rest hands on edge of desk or wrist pad
- Ⓧ Type with elbows on the desk or on arms of chair
- Ⓧ Sit with spine slumped in the chair
- Ⓧ Hit the keys too hard
- Ⓧ Press the keys until fingers go white



## Construction Sites, Stock Rooms and Factories

It is important to use **ergonomically correct tools**—tools that fit or that can be adjusted to fit your physical needs. **Proper lifting equipment should be provided by your boss** (i.e., mechanical lifts, dollies). Use this equipment for heavy loads.

## Tips for Lifting When Equipment isn't Available:

- Ⓧ Never lift heavy loads alone—ASK FOR HELP and only lift when necessary
- Ⓧ Squat down when you lift, but keep your heels off the floor
- Ⓧ Let your legs do most of the work so your back doesn't get stressed
- Ⓧ Get as close to the object as you can and position it between your legs
- Ⓧ Lift slow & easy, keeping the load close to your body, using your abs and butt muscles as well as your legs, and keep your chin tucked in to keep your back & neck in line

# GETTING HELP!!

**CALL NYCOSH.** The New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) is a worker-friendly organization that will provide advice to you about where to go for help. NYCOSH is a non-profit coalition of 200 local unions and more than 400 individual workers, physicians, lawyers and other health and safety activists – all dedicated to the right of every worker to a safe and healthful workplace.

**CONTACT: NYCOSH 212-227-6440**  
[www.nycosh.org](http://www.nycosh.org)



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