

Improving work-related health: musculoskeletal health risks

Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSDs) include a wide range of conditions that impact muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, nerves, and other soft tissues.

Common WRMSDs include sprains and strains to lower backs and upper and lower limbs, and nerve compressions like carpal tunnel syndrome. MSDs include discomfort and pain developing over a period of time.

27%

WorkSafe estimates that 27% of work-related harm is attributed to MSDs

38%

Sprains and strains make up 38% of ACC claims

\$1.39m

Days of work are lost as a result of sprains and strains each year

Contributory factors for discomfort, pain, and injury

Assessment of musculoskeletal risks will identify the contributing factors (hazards). Once the contributing factors are understood, decisions can be made about how to control them. This may require skilled assessment by knowledgeable professionals. Controls can address different contributing factors, with the most effective interventions being those that target multiple factors.



Biomechanical and physical

- awkward postures/workplace layout
- high loads/forceful movements
- task repetition/invariability
- vibration



Environmental

- heat, cold
- noise
- air quality
- lighting



Individual

- age
- experience
- body size
- strength
- fitness
- health
- nutrition



Work organisation

- work hours/rosters/rest breaks
- task methods
- workload
- training
- workplace design
- authority



Psychosocial

- stress/pressure from inside and outside of work
- lack of control over how the work is done
- bullying, harassment, violence

WorkSafe's actions by 2025 to prevent harm

Our aim

Learn more about the jobs and industries where discomfort and injury are common and the contributing factors.

Provide knowledge and resources for businesses to manage discomfort and injury risks.

Improve WorkSafe's expertise and resources for managing discomfort and injury risks.

Make it easier for businesses and the wider system to access, use, and contribute to, the existing body of knowledge about WRMSDs.

Develop fit-for-purpose tools and monitoring mechanisms that focus on outcomes and risk management, rather than prioritising compliance.

Link with others to support good work design and discomfort and injury risk management.

What we'll do



Define work-related musculoskeletal disorders and analyse data to understand harm within the New Zealand workforce and target specific industries.



Engage with and learn from workers, communities, whānau, unions and iwi to understand barriers and enablers to good work-related health.



Work with subject matter experts to develop guidance on priority musculoskeletal disorders and the most effective interventions.



Help businesses design out musculoskeletal risks through guidance and other resources.



Develop and maintain relationships with professional bodies and health and safety practitioners working with businesses and organisations to reduce musculoskeletal harm.



Increase WorkSafe's capacity and capability to respond to businesses and organisations experiencing musculoskeletal harm, including within the WorkSafe inspectorate.



Investigate how WorkSafe can work with our system partners to support businesses to build safer work environments.



Develop systems to measure improvements from WorkSafe interventions.
