

Construction workers and musculoskeletal injuries

One of the most common injuries to construction workers often has the quietest beginnings. Musculoskeletal disorders are injuries to muscles, tendons, nerves, cartilage and spinal disks. These injuries can develop from single accidents such as falls, but they often develop over time.

Musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs, make up 25 percent of construction worker injuries. It includes conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, bursitis and tendinitis. Some construction workers are more likely to sustain these injuries than others.

Laborers are the most likely to develop a work-related musculoskeletal disorder. They are injured at the rate of 45.2 MSDs per 10,000 workers. Helpers and plumbers have the second and third highest rates of MSDs, at roughly 36 per 10,000 workers. Carpenters are injured at a rate of 33.7 MSDs per 10,000 FTEs. Overall, the construction industry's musculoskeletal injury rate is 32.1 per 10,000 FTEs.

These injuries happen in part because of the nature of construction work. Construction workers are often forced into awkward postures, for example. An awkward posture forces a body away from a comfortable position. Bending, kneeling, working overhead and twisting are examples of awkward postures.

Over a period of time, repetitive motions, especially in awkward postures, can lead to musculoskeletal disorders. So can motions that require excessive force, vibrations and jobs that force people into static positions for long periods of time. Poorly designed tools also contribute to these injuries.

Although these injuries may seem to come with the territory

for construction workers, they can be reduced or prevented. Better materials and tools, changing work methods and organization, and stretching and protective equipment can also be helpful. For example, use platforms, lifts, carts and dollies and make loads smaller. Use power tools instead of hand tools when you can.

If you do suffer work-related injuries on a construction job site, an experienced workers' compensation attorney can help you obtain the benefits you deserve. For more information, see our page on construction site accidents.

Source: Preventing Sprains, Strains, and Repetitive Motion Injuries, State Building & Construction Trades Council of California, AFL-CIO, 2012, available as powerpoint.