

# Sprains and Strains

As we come into colder weather the prevalence of sprains and strains increases, particularly for those that play sport or engage in heavy work activities. Sprains and strains are a common workplace injury, which may occur as a result of a simple incident from over-exertion or a series of minor strains which build over time.

- A sprain is an injury to the ligaments and capsule at a joint in the body.
- A strain is an injury to muscles or tendons.

Soft tissue injuries may be sudden (acute) or long-standing (chronic). Healing depends on factors including the type of tissue and severity of injury, treatment undertaken, previous injuries, and the age and general health of the person.

One of the methods to avoid sprains and strains is to warm up before participating in any sports, exercise or work activity. When your muscles are tight, they are vulnerable to strain.

Get your body warmed up with some light exercise. When you're warmed up (not before), commit to a full-body stretch session, focusing on additional stretches for your high-risk muscle groups.

Stretching allows your large joints (such as your shoulders and knees) to reach their maximum movement potential and is also a good time to mentally prepare for an event or work by clearing the mind, increasing focus, on the tasks ahead.

- Job task rotation to reduce the repetitive nature of a task, e.g. limiting tasks to set time limits and rotating tasks with another worker
- Shared tasks to reduce the load, e.g. shared lift of heavy object
- Correct use of tools and body positioning, e.g. limit reaching and conduct tasks close to your bodies core/center of gravity

Are you suffering similar injuries time and time again? If you have encountered several wrist strains or back sprains, do a mental inventory of your daily tasks at work. A common repetitive action could be causing your body to move incorrectly, causing the sprain to re-occur again (and again, and again!) Uncovering work patterns that are causing your injury can help you to modify them for the future—and therefore, minimize your risk!

Suggestions for immediate treatment of acute sprains or strains include:

- Stop your activity.
- Rest the injured area.
- Put icepacks on the area for 20 minutes every 2 hours, separated from the skin by wet toweling.
- Compress or bandage the injured site firmly, extending the wrapping from below to above.
- Elevate (raise) the injured area above heart height whenever practical.
- Avoid heat, alcohol, running and massage of the affected area in the first 72 hours after the injury, as this can increase swelling.
- If symptoms get worse in the first 24 hours, see your doctor for further medical investigation.

If you have any queries or need assistance in ensuring you are meeting your obligations under legislation, don't hesitate to contact our WHS Coordinator on **(08) 8348 1243** or email us at [safety@peer.com.au](mailto:safety@peer.com.au)