

General Information on Repetitive Strain Injury

Introduction

Repetitive Strain Injuries (Musculoskeletal disorders of the upper and lower limbs) are a major problem in the workplace and a significant cause of lost production, with an estimated cost to industry of up to £20bn annually.

Sources state that:

- Dealing with the impact of RSI conditions accounts for between 0.5% and 2% of UK gross national income.
- The cost to UK industry is likely to be between £5bn & £20bn annually.
- One large employer found that the average cost of retiring an employee on medical grounds was £40,000

About RSI:

Because RSI injuries are invisible the general public tend to be unaware of the pain and distress caused to those affected. Many people are unclear as to the origin and treatment of these conditions.

RSI isn't a recognised medical condition but a generic term used amongst support groups, trade unions and members of the public to cover either a range of specific disorders of the musculoskeletal system (Type 1 RSI) or non-specific pain syndrome (NSPS)(Type 2 RSI), which recent research attributes to nerve damage. These are almost always occupational in origin, although other factors may also be involved.

Typical Symptoms From Which Your Staff May Suffer:

Symptoms of numbness, tingling, sharp pain, dull ache, weakness, loss of grip and restricted movement of limbs can render people incapable of carrying out the simplest tasks at work or at home. Lack of accurate diagnosis and access to appropriate treatment further exacerbate the condition, frequently resulting in job loss and economic deprivation. RSI conditions occur both in lower and upper limbs as well as affecting the spine in various areas., which in turn can cause the onset of referred pain in the limbs making diagnosis difficult.

Specific Conditions

The Lancet has listed 22 conditions under the RSI term, including:

- Frozen Shoulder
- Carpel Tunnel Syndrome
- Writers Cramp
 - Tendonitis
 - Trigger Finger/Thumb.

Five of these 22 condition, including Carpel Tunnel Syndrome, Vibration White Finger and Cramp of the hand may, under certain circumstances, be accepted by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) as “prescribed industrial diseases) and may attract Industrial Injuries Benefits.

High Economic Cost:

According to the TUC:

- 1:50 (approximately half a million) of all workers in the UK have reported and RSI condition.
- 5.4 million working days were lost due to RSI related sick leave in 2002.
- Every day 6 people in the UK leave their jobs due to an RSI condition.

The rising prevalence of RSI has a significant impact on the economy. Employers whose staff develop RSI as a result of work face a range of costs, some evident others hidden. These may include:

- Loss of production.
- Poor worker morale.
- Sickness payments for those unable to work
- ‘Presenteeism’ – staff at work when they are not fit to be there, but who are afraid to be absent.
- Ill health retirement costs for those permanently unable to work.
- Recruitment and retraining costs as skilled and experienced workers need to be replaced. The average cost of replacing employees due to injury, long-term illness or early retirement is £3000 - £4000 per employee. One large employer found that the average cost of retiring an employee on medical grounds was £40,000.
- Bad publicity.
- Difficulties with recruitment.
- Litigation costs and compensation payments to those successfully pursuing negligence claims.
- Increased insurance premiums.
- In some cases the total cost of to an employer of ill managed RSI conditions can be the equivalent of 50% of the employees total salary.

Could Your Equipment Be Causing RSI?

Alan Hedge, Director of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Laboratory at Cornell University has stated:

“The idea [behind laptop/notebook computers] was portability for occasional use. It was never intended to be a machine you would work on for 8 hours a day, 52 weeks a year.”

Laptop computers were designed with portability in mind. Many of the design features which make laptops excellent mobile solutions create problems when it comes to ergonomics.

There has been speculation in the American press that forced use of a laptop which then results in RSI could provide the basis for a lawsuit against the employer.

In order to avoid tribunal or court appearances, costs of up to £40,000 to retire an employee, fines of £87,000 (as levied 9/02/01 in Plymouth County Court) or increasing sick leave from your most dedicated staff, then you need to examine the ergonomic arrangements under which they are working.

What Next Steps Could You Take?

An Ergonomic Assessment examines the existing environment and practices. The assessment will identify any problems clearly and swiftly, and will make recommendations to help you prevent the development of RSI within your workforce. If any of your employees already has RSI then a more detailed assessment can be provided covering medical history, full task analysis, problem identification and possible solutions.

For further information on how to minimise RSI in your workplace, please contact Ruth Hodges, Managing Director of occupational health specialists Sikasso Ltd.

Tel: 056 01946 798

Email: info@sikasso.co.uk

More information about Sikasso Ltd and our services can be found on our website at: <http://www.sikasso.co.uk>