OREGON HEALTH & SCIENCE UNIVERSITY

SAFETYNEWS

Monthly Newsletter for OHSU SafetyTeam

Editor: Margaret Gardner July 2009

HEAD TO TOE SAFETY: FOOTWEAR TO ERGONOMICS

SUMMER FOOTWEAR

It's no surprise that many people like to wear summer shoes such as Crocs and sandals in the workplace for cool comfort. But healthcare and research settings are very different from the beach, the garden, or the supermarket. When choosing the right footwear for work, consider your environment and the circumstances that surround you at work. Healthcare and research settings, such as hospitals and labs, hold many potential risks to unprotected feet. Support and protection are the most important areas to consider when choosing workplace footwear.

Support

By design, many casual shoes are designed with no back or minimal straps in order to easily slip them on and off. This often does not provide sufficient ankle support, particularly considering that some healthcare workers routinely need to lift and move patients, equipment and materials. Many of us need to traverse our very hilly, and sometimes awkward sidewalks and pathways. Long shifts are required of us and arch support needs to be adequate for those long periods of working on our feet.

Protection

One of the most noticeable elements of summer shoes, especially Crocs, is the ventilation. Ventilation holes throughout the classic Croc, strappy sandals and open toed wedges may keep your feet cooler than closed shoes. But it's easy to see how this could be a hazard, especially in healthcare and research areas. Shoes that do not fully cover your feet do not protect against chemical or biological exposures and spills. The open-ended heels of slip-on shoes also leave your feet susceptible to injury from wheelchairs or other equipment.

Solutions

If you like the fit of Crocs or similar shoes, companies have now introduced several versions that are much more suitable for environments we encounter at OHSU.

Wearing casual summer shoes in most work areas at OHSU presents significant risk. Make smart choices for comfort, support and your own style. Keep in mind the dress code policies for your area. In general, closed-toe, low heeled shoes with slip-resistant soles are the most appropriate shoes to wear to work at OHSU.

Use your ID badge and ask for the 10% OHSU discount at the following Portland stores:

www.clogsnmore.com

www.artnsole.net

Contents:

Environmental Health & Radiation Safety 503-494-7795

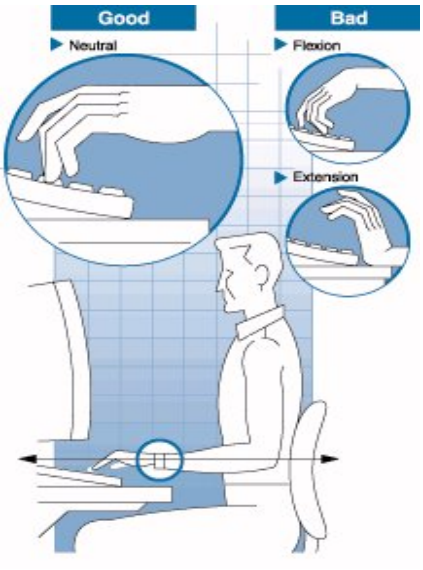
Topic of the Month:

WORKSTATION ERGONOMICS

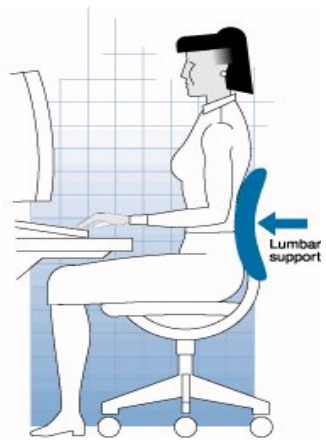
There are several risk factors that increase chance of injury while working at a computer workstation. Each factor described here can potentially cause problems. We're often exposed to more than one risk factor at a time. Most injuries and discomfort can be avoided by following these ergonomic principles.

Proper Posture involves the hands, wrists, back and neck. Chair adjustment is the first step to ensure that your workstation has the right fit.

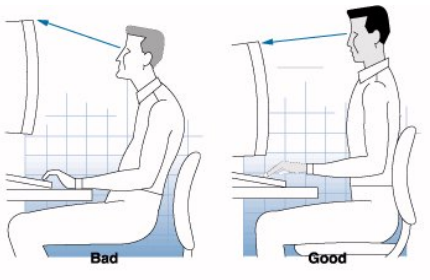
Hands and Wrists should be kept in a neutral position while typing and using the mouse. This reduces the risk of developing tendonitis or other injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Use of a wrist rest gives the arm and hand needed support for maintaining a flat, or neutral, wrist position.



Back Support is achieved when your chair is adjusted to support your stature. The back rest supports your lower back and the chair should rise high or low enough so that your feet are flat and firm on the floor. Fully adjustable chairs also allow minor rocking motion, change in seat pan position and adjustment of armrest height. The OHSU Ergonomics Council provides a list of recommended chairs and keyboard trays, and can be found through a link on the EHRS Ergonomics web pages.



Head and Neck Position is important to prevent pain in the neck and shoulder areas while computing. Sit straight and use the back rest to support your lower back. This establishes a neutral posture for your neck and head. Adjust your monitor height accordingly, as pictured above.



Duration and Repetition of the same motion continuously over a period of time creates a higher chance of developing a 'repetitive stress' injury. Make an effort to vary your activity whenever possible.

Recovery is possible with adequate breaks and changes in tasks. If you find that your work involves extended duration and repetition, make an effort to take your breaks in a way that involves other physical patterns and activities, rather than checking personal email or otherwise remaining at your workstation.

Force is the effort it takes to move or remain in a fixed position. The force known as contact stress comes from pressure against a part of the body. For example, resting wrists against a hard and/or sharp edge of a desk while working at a computer causes contact stress.

Quality of Environment may present issues if it involves improper lighting, glare, noise and other irritating conditions.

Organization of Work can make a significant difference ergonomically speaking. It can be helpful to examine and improve factors such as staff levels, schedules, job pace, monotonous tasks, and the amount of control workers have over how they perform their jobs.

The EHRS Ergonomics Website has been updated to better serve you! Check it out at:

http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/about/services/integrity/ehrs/safety/gen/ergo.cfm

SAFETYTEAM MEMBERSHIP

SafetyTeam Members spend approximately 15 minutes per month to help ensure a safe workplace at OHSU. Members receive monthly email with a link to this newsletter and a few brief questions to answer.

Members then channel safety concerns from locations and departments all over OHSU to the SafetyTeam Coordinator, who then helps connect members with resources and when necessary, brings concerns to the OHSU Safety Committee.

To join, contact safeteam@oshu.com or 4-7795.

Systems Thinking: Getting Stuck

This monthly feature outlines an incident that was reported in the Worker & Student Injury Reporting System (WSIRS). The system asks for accounts from both the employee and the supervisor. It then asks supervisors what could have prevented the incident, and what actions would be taken in this regard.

Employee: The finger next to my thumb was stuck with a needle. I was picking up my micromop from the floor and as I did this, a needle that got into the mop stuck my finger. I showed both the needle and the slightly poked finger to the nurse.

Supervisor: A needle got caught in a mop. The employee should have been more watchful in the work area. I instructed the employee to be more careful and get checked by a doctor.

In this example, the supervisor didn't step very far back in finding a root cause. Prevention measures stopped at telling the employee to be more careful, but there was an opportunity here to prevent future injuries, not just for this employee but for others as well.

Why was there a needle on the floor? Do mop heads require direct handling? Why didn't the needle make it to a sharps container? There's a lot more digging that could be done here. Tasked with investigating this incident, what questions would you ask?

ERGONOMICS ON THE WEB

The EHRS Ergonomics Website includes step by step guidance on adjusting your own workstation. Learn what action to take to make your work experience more comfortable and productive:

http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/about/services/integrity/ehrs/safety/gen/ergo.cfm

Additional Internet Resources:

UCLA Ergonomics

Cornell University Ergonomics Web

Welcome to Ergoweb - The Place for Ergonomics

Ohio State University - Institute for Ergonomics

OSHA Ergonomic Solutions: Computer Workstations eTool

For a current issue of SAFETYNEWS online, and for archives, visit:

http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/about/services/integrity/ehrs/safety/gen/safetynews.cfm

The SAFETYTEAM page is available at:

http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/about/services/integrity/ehrs/safety/gen/safetyteam.cfm

These pages are updated regularly. Send suggestions to the SafetyTeam Coordinator at:

safeteam@ohsu.edu

Questions? Contact Environmental Health & Radiation Safety:

503-494-7795

AFSCME Labor/Management Cooperation OHSU