



[Workers' Comp](#)

Supporting an Aging Workforce Through Ergonomics

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5 MIN READ

As the American workforce ages, workplace safety and productivity are being redefined. Musculoskeletal injuries are becoming more common, especially among employees over 55, and the cost of claims is rising with them. As a risk manager, you care about keeping your employees safe. But you're also looking for ways to reduce injury-related costs. Ergonomics is a practical and proven solution to assist with this growing concern. By designing environments that match the needs of older employees, you can reduce injuries, retain talent, and increase productivity.

The Aging Workforce

[According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(BLS\)](#), the labor force participation rate for individuals aged 55 and older is projected to increase significantly. By 2030, one in four U.S. workers will be 55 or older. This demographic shift underscores the importance of addressing the unique needs of older workers, who are more susceptible to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and other work-related injuries.

Using Ergonomics to Cut Costs and Support Your Aging Workforce

Reduction in Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs)

Ergonomics aims to reduce the risk factors that lead to MSDs, such as repetitive motion, awkward postures, and forceful exertions. Implementing ergonomic solutions lead to a significant reduction in these disorders. For instance, [a study by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries](#) found that ergonomic interventions resulted in a 59% reduction in MSDs and a 68% reduction in workers' compensation costs.

Improved Productivity

Ergonomic improvements not only prevent injuries but lead to a 25% increase in productivity. By designing workstations that promote good posture and reduce physical strain, employees work more efficiently. This is particularly beneficial for older workers, who may experience decreased physical capabilities.

Enhanced Employee Engagement and Morale

When employees feel that their health and safety are prioritized, their engagement and morale improve. Ergonomic [workplaces reduce fatigue and discomfort, leading to lower absenteeism and turnover rates](#). This is especially important for older workers, who may face more health challenges than their younger counterparts.

Four Ergonomic Interventions that Help Employers Adapt to Their Aging Workforce

Older workers are more prone to injuries due to age-related changes, such as decreased muscle strength, joint flexibility, and slower reaction times. These ergonomic interventions mitigate risks by adapting the work environment to their needs.

- 1. **Customized Workstations:** Adjust workstations to fit the physical capabilities of your older workers to prevent injuries. For example, [adjustable chairs, workstation heights, and computer monitors help maintain proper posture and reduce strain on the back and neck](#).
- 2. **Lift Assist Devices:** Provide your employees with assistive devices for manual material handling to help workers lift, move, and carry heavy or awkward items, reducing the risk of injury and improving efficiency. Examples include height-adjustable carts, electric pallet jacks, lift tables, hoists, and even exoskeletons.
- 3. **Training and Education:** Train your employees on proper body mechanics and the use of ergonomic equipment. [Older workers benefit from understanding how to adjust their workstations and perform tasks in ways that minimize strain](#).
- 4. **Regular Breaks and Job Rotation:** Encourage your employees to take regular breaks and job rotation to reduce the risk of repetitive strain injuries. This approach [allows older workers to rest and recover, reducing the likelihood of chronic injuries](#).

Jobs with the Highest Incidence of Musculoskeletal Injuries

As more employees work later into life, the risk of musculoskeletal disorders is becoming a serious concern, especially in physically demanding roles. Jobs like material handling, nursing assistance, truck driving, and construction involve repetitive strain and awkward postures. At the same time, a growing share of these workers are over 55. This combination increases the likelihood of injuries that are more severe, more frequent, and take longer to heal. Ergonomics offers a practical solution to this challenge. It helps employers reduce injuries, protect experienced workers, and support long-term productivity.

[According to the BLS, the following occupations have the highest rates of MSDs:](#)

		% of Workers Over 55
Occupation	Risk Factors	

Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers	These workers often engage in heavy lifting, repetitive motions, and awkward postures, leading to a high incidence of MSDs.	<u>15%</u>
Nursing Assistants	The physical demands of patient care, including lifting and transferring patients, contribute to a high rate of MSDs in this occupation.	<u>20%</u>
Truck Drivers (Heavy/Tractor-Trailer)	Prolonged sitting, vibration from the vehicle, and manual handling of cargo are significant risk factors for MSDs.	<u>15%</u>
Construction Workers	Tasks involving heavy lifting, repetitive motions, and awkward postures make construction workers susceptible to MSDs.	<u>22.3%</u>
Health Care and Social Assistance	This sector has a high number of MSD cases due to the physical demands of patient care and handling.	<u>26%</u>

Recovery Time for Older Workers

When an older worker gets hurt, their recovery often takes longer. That means prevention is even more critical for you. [According to Safety National, older workers' injury recovery time may be prolonged by an average of 13 days compared to younger workers.](#) Chronic pre-existing conditions complicate treatment and extend recovery periods. [This highlights the importance of preventive measures, such as ergonomic interventions, to minimize the occurrence of injuries in the first place.](#)

Create a More Resilient Workforce

An aging workforce does not have to lead to higher injury rates or rising claims. With the right ergonomic strategies, you can stay ahead of risk, protect your employees and show leadership in safety. These are practical changes that benefit both your team and your bottom line. Even small improvements can make a big difference. Each step you take helps create a safer, stronger workplace and a more resilient workforce.

[Explore how better ergonomics can support aging employees and reduce workplace injuries. >](#)



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