Introduction

By the end of this lesson, learners should be able to:

- Understand the basics of safety in the workplace

Safety in the Workplace

In 1970, Congress passed the **Occupational Safety and Health Act**. This act requires employers to follow occupational safety and health standards, providing workplaces free from serious recognized hazards. This law helps protect workers by setting and enforcing workplace safety and health standards. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) provides safety and health information, training, and assistance to employers and workers.

In order to comply with OSHA, employers should provide safety training as a part of job orientation and follow an established safety policy. Ideally, employers provide regular safety training to enforce their safety policy, making the greatest effort to prevent accidents and injuries in the workplace.

Health and Safety at Your Desk

The simple act of sitting in a desk and working on a computer can put stress and strain on your body. Over time, this unnecessary strain can result in painful injuries. These injuries can sometimes lead to decreased productivity and lost workdays. To maintain your health and safety, consider the following:

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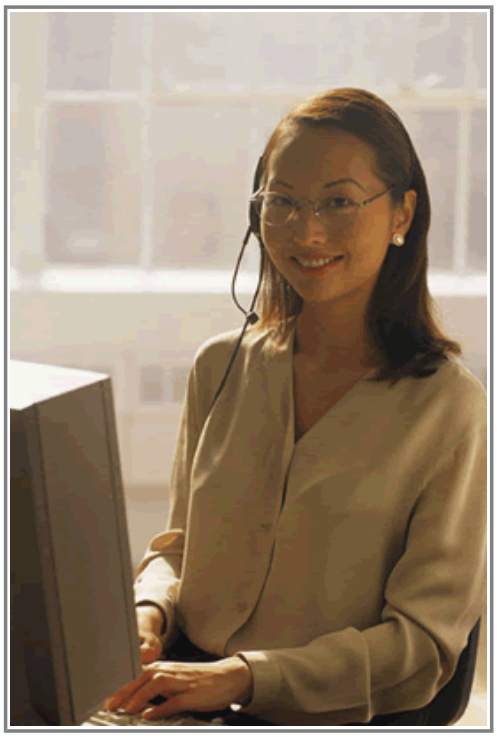
Body Position



- Head and neck should be upright, not bent forward or backward.
- Head, neck, and trunk should face forward.
- Trunk should be perpendicular to the floor.
- Shoulders and upper arms should be relaxed and perpendicular to the floor, not outstretched or elevated.
- Upper arms and elbow should be close to the body.
- Forearms, wrists, and hands should be straight and parallel to the floor.
- Thighs should be parallel to the floor and lower legs about perpendicular to the floor, not crossed.
- Feet should rest flat on the floor.
- Thighs shouldn't be restricted by the height of the desk.
- Legs and feet should have enough space so the you can get close enough to the desk and monitor.

Health and Safety at Your Desk (Continued)

Chair

- Chair should accommodate your size (it should not be too big or too small).
- Seat has cushioning and rounded edges.
- Armrests support both forearms but shouldn't interfere with movements.

Monitor

- The monitor should be directly in front of you so you don't have to twist head or neck.
- The monitor should be at or directly below eye level.
- You should be able to read what's displayed on the monitor without twisting or stretching.
- No glare should be present which might cause you to assume an awkward position.

Keyboard and input device (mouse or trackball)

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- Input device should be located next to the keyboard so no reaching is necessary.
- Wrists and hands should not rest on a sharp edge.

Safety Accessories for Your Desk

There are many desk accessories that can increase comfort and safety at your desk.

- **Keyboard trays** can be used to optimize keyboard and input device positioning. The tray should be large enough to accommodate both keyboard and input device.
- A **wrist pad** can be used to support wrists and forearms. It should be soft are rounded, yet firm enough to support weight of wrists.
- A **document holder** can be used to position documents. Documents should be placed at or just below eye level and close enough to the monitor so there is little head motion when the employee looks at the monitor and the document.
- A **footrest** can be used to position feet properly.
- A **backrest** can provide support for your lower back.
- The **telephone** should be placed within reach. It shouldn't be propped between the ear and shoulder.

To help alleviate strain on your body, stand up, stretch, or walk around at least once an hour.

Basic Safety Tips

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While safety rules vary according the organization and specific job, there are several basic things you can do to remain safe in the workplace. Many accidents are due to careless behavior that might have been easily prevented.

- Walk at all times. Be careful going through doors. Moving in a controlled fashion decreases the chance of accidents. Never run, jump, or engage in horseplay.
- Keep your work area clean. Unattended open drawers, wastebaskets, papers, litter, garbage, boxes and other debris increase the chances of slips, trips, and falls.
- Don't touch or use any equipment that you have not been trained or given permission to use. If you are asked to use machinery, make sure you understand how to use it, the hazards of using it, and protective clothing that is needed. Be aware that loose fitting gloves, long hair, clothing, and jewelry can get caught in machinery.
- If you are asked to use a product that might be hazardous, make sure you know about the hazards and how to protect yourself. Even common cleaning products can contain chemicals that could be hazardous if used improperly.
- Smoke in designated smoking areas only. Thoroughly extinguish all tobacco products when finished.
- Be aware of flammable materials that can catch on fire, including solvents such as oil, gas, paint thinner, etc.

Basic Safety Tips (Continued)

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- Stay away from contact with bodily fluids (blood, saliva, urine, etc.). If you are required to clean up bodily fluids, take universal precautions. If you have not been instructed on universal precautions, ask for training.
- If your job requires you to lift things, lift with your legs (get instruction from your supervisor, if needed). If something is too heavy, ask for help.
- Be careful when lifting or stacking items above your head. If you must use a ladder, be sure it's stable and equipped with non-slip treads. Never use a chair as a substitute for a ladder.
- Know what to do during an emergency. Pay attention during emergency drills, so you know the routes to take when leaving an assigned area to go to a safe place.
- Observe all cautionary signs in the workplace.
- If you believe a job task is unsafe, believe something in the environment is unsafe, or if you have any question at all about safety, talk to your supervisor immediately.

Getting Injured on the Job

Do everything you can to ensure your health and safety both at home and in the workplace. Participate and support your workplace's safety program, and always follow all safety rules and regulations.

However, if you are injured,

- Tell your supervisor immediately.
- Follow the prescribed safety procedure.

If a co-worker is ever injured and fails to go to a supervisor, talk to your supervisor.

If you fail to report an injury to your supervisor, it could make it difficult to make a worker's compensation claim.

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More Resources

- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). OSHA is a division of the U.S. Department of Labor. Search safety topics and articles.
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) . NIOSH is the Federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related disease and injury. The Institute is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Search safety topics and articles.
- National Safety Council. Many helpful articles for home and workplace safety.
- U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. Safety product reviews.

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