

## February 29 Marks the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day

February 15, 2021

**Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) Awareness Day is February 29th (February 28th in non-leap years). As the only "non-repetitive" day of the year, it's the ideal date to devote to raising awareness of repetitive strain injuries. RSI Day is a global event which will be honoured in more than 30 countries this year**

### What are RSIs?

Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSIs) are an umbrella term describing painful ailments affecting tendons, muscles, nerves and joints due to overuse or misuse. RSIs typically affect body parts like the neck, back, chest, shoulders, arms and hands. These symptoms can progress into chronic and crippling disorders which sometimes no amount of physiotherapy or surgery can correct. RSIs are also known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) and result in the highest frequency of lost-time injuries in Canada. Many of our Unifor members continue to fall prey to repetitive strain injuries on their jobs and the prevalence of RSI injuries is more than all other occupationally incurred injuries combined.

- tendinitis
- bursitis
- neuritis
- tenosynovitis
- arthritis
- muscle strain
- low-back injury
- herniated disk
- carpal tunnel syndrome

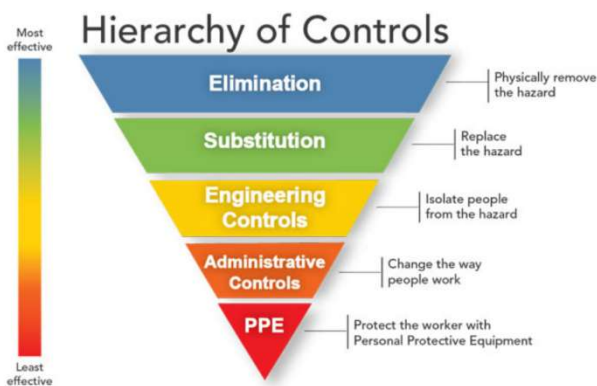
Common symptoms can range from mild to severe and usually develop gradually, including

- throbbing
  - aches and pains
  - tenderness
  - burning
  - tingling
  - loss of joint movement
  - numbness
  - swelling
  - weakness
  - cramps
  - stiffness
- And strength in the affected area

## What Are The Ergonomic Hazards That Cause RSIs?

Ergonomic hazards are workplace conditions that pose the risk of injury to an employee. The continual repetition of ordinary natural movements like gripping, holding, bending, twisting, clenching, and reaching can cause injury, especially if combined with awkward postures. Fixed or static body positions, or excessive force, concentrated on small parts of the body such as the hand or wrist can cause injury, sometimes quite quickly. The pace of work, if too fast, combined with insufficient breaks or recovery time, may also lead to an RSI. Other factors, such as vibration or cold stress, can also impact RSIs. Despite their prevalence in the world of work, RSI causing factors can be prevented in numerous ways

### RSI Prevention



It is important to know that hazards are best eliminated at their source. The hierarchy of controls is a tool in aiding workers to minimize their exposure to hazards. The prevention of RSIs begins with eliminating repetitive work through job design.

Certain tasks can be eliminated through automation.

Well-designed workstations should be adjustable to fit the worker. This may involve both sitting and standing

Some work can be structured so that workers can rotate between different tasks, thereby using different muscle groups and having limited exposure to ergonomic hazards.

At all times workers should properly sourced and maintained tools and equipment to reduce the efforts required to prevent muscle strain, and avoid awkward positions.

Employers should encourage workers to take short, frequent rest breaks.

### COVID-19 and Working From Home

There are many excellent resources available regarding office ergonomics which can be used as guide for working from home. Take a look at this OHCOW website as starting point <https://www.ohcow.on.ca/ohcow-ergonomic-resources.html>. Working from home does not mean you have to suffer an RSI as a result. Your employer has a responsibility to maintain a safe and ergonomically sound workstation. Engage with your supervisor or JH&SC to make sure that you are working safely from home – that means avoiding RSIs from the home workplace!

### What We Can Do As a Union

Understanding that RSIs are a major hazard in our workplaces, we must ensure that they are treated with the same precautions as other workplace hazards like chemical, physical or psychosocial hazards. We must highlight them and attempt to eliminate them, or at least control them.

This is achieved through the participation of workers in health and safety in the workplace. This participation is achieved through the function of the joint health and safety committee or through union health and safety representatives.

Ergonomic hazards must be highlighted and jobs that hurt must be changed in such a way to prevent RSIs. Workers must be vocal in highlighting concerns to supervision and health and safety committees; safety representatives must be adamant in bringing forward unresolved ergonomic concerns to management and demand they be addressed. We encourage immediate reporting to provincial worker's compensation authorities of all work-related injuries, including RSIs. Certainly, workers who are suffering from RSIs must be given first aid and medical treatment, and if any lost time is incurred, worker's compensation benefits.

As a union we know that the bargaining table is a powerful tool in improving health and safety conditions and we encourage the addition of ergonomic language improvements in our collective agreements. Ergonomic issues must be a focus of the workplace health and safety committee; in many workplaces we have negotiated specific ergonomic representatives and national representatives.

Unfortunately, enforceable ergonomic workplace regulations exist in a limited number of Canadian jurisdictions and we must, as a union, continue to press our provincial governments to enact stronger ergonomic protections and standards in our respective occupational health and safety legislation. Ergonomic improvements and mandated references to accepted standards will help both workers and employers achieve a high standard of workplace health and safety.

#### **Excellent Resources related to RSI Day from OHCOW**

We invite all of you to partake in a number of special RSI Day awareness webinars that are scheduled weekly in February, from the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) <https://www.ohcow.on.ca/2021-rsi-day.html>. We also call your attention to an RSI Day awareness event in Manitoba being held by the MFL (Manitoba Federation of Labour) which makes the link between psychosocial factors and musculoskeletal injuries. The link is here <http://mfloh.mb.ca/events/feb-26th-rsi-day-free-virtual-event-making-the-link-between-psychosocial-factors-musculoskeletal-injuries-msi/>. (Please register beforehand)

**RSI's are preventable - let's all do our part in ensuring that workers are kept free of all ergonomic hazards in the workplace.**

For more information on RSI Day or workplace ergonomics contact the Unifor National Health and Safety Department at (416) 497-4110 or at [healthandsafety@unifor.org](mailto:healthandsafety@unifor.org)

**Sources:**

[https://www.ccohs.ca/events/rsi/#:~:text=Repetitive%20Strain%20Injury%20\(RSI\)%20Awareness%20Day%20is%20February%2029th\\*,awareness%20of%20repetitive%20strain%20injuries.](https://www.ccohs.ca/events/rsi/#:~:text=Repetitive%20Strain%20Injury%20(RSI)%20Awareness%20Day%20is%20February%2029th*,awareness%20of%20repetitive%20strain%20injuries.)

<https://www.pshsa.ca/safe-environments/resources/rsi-awareness-day>

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hierarchy/default.html>

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ergonomics-workplace>

<https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/ergonomics/>

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