**OOS**

**Information on Occupational Overuse Syndrome**

**What is OOS?**

Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS), also known as Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI), is a term used for conditions that are characterised by persistent pain or discomfort in muscles, tendons and other soft tissue.

Conditions resulting from OOS can include:

* Carpal Tunnel Syndrome – occurs when the median nerve, which runs from the forearm into the hand, becomes pressed or squeezed at the wrist. This causes numbness and tingling in the fingers and hand.
* Tenosynovitis - is the swelling of tendons which causes pain mainly in the hands and wrists.
* Epicondylitis - condition where the elbow becomes painful and tender.

**What causes OOS?**

OOS is generally an occupational-related condition, usually caused by mixture of poor ergonomics, repetitive motion, stress and poor posture.

Common causes include:

* Using work benches that are too high or too low, this puts your body in awkward positions for long lengths of time.
* Badly designed tools which require excessive force to use.
* Poor workstation layout.
* Twisting or stretching to perform repetitive tasks.
* Continual use of computer keyboards and mouse components.

According to the Australian safety data, the occupations most at risk for suffering from OOS are:

* Process work (assembly line, sorting, packing and press operation).
* Piece work (working in a fixed position on one machine).
* Office work (keyboard, typing, clerical work).
* Mail sorting.
* Kitchen work.
* Cleaning.
* Hairdressers.
* Musicians.
* Construction workers (bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers and tilers).

**What are the symptoms of OOS?**

Symptoms of OOS can include numbness, swelling, pain, stiffness, weakness or tingling in the hands, wrists, elbows, shoulders, back, neck and lower limbs. Often discomfort brought on by a particular task will improve when it is stopped i.e. if the pain lessens or disappears over weekends or during holidays.

If the discomfort begins in one area but then spreads to other parts of the body – this may manifest as sore shoulders, neck pain, stiffness in the limbs and hands.

It is important to remember that any ongoing physical discomfort should be reported.

**Treating OOS**

The symptoms of severe OOS can make a worker incapable of carrying out even simple tasks with restricted movement of limbs and loss of grip. Early identification and treatment of OOS is important.

The main treatment for OOS is resting the limb from factors that make the condition worse such as the task that caused the injury and any other related duties.

Secondary treatments aim to help relieve existing symptoms, including:

* Medication – anti-inflammatory/painkillers
* Physiotherapy
* Massage
* Acupuncture
* Surgery

Early detection and treatment increase the chance that the condition will be reversed or symptoms eased.

**How can you prevent OOS?**

Consultation between workers and supervisors on job procedures and design, organisation and layout will assess any likelihood of future problems.

Suggestions on what to look for include:

* Assess your work sitting or standing position – good ergonomic practice should be integrated into the workplace.
* Work should be organised to mix repetitive tasks with non-repetitive tasks.
* Have short rest breaks from that activity every hour.
* Train yourself to use gentle exercises and stretches to reduce muscle tension.
* Vary workload – for example if you have a lot of lifting to do, try and break it up with another task or short breaks.
* If using a computer a lot, change to an ergonomic keyboard or mouse – if the condition already exists this will not cure the problem but may help to ease the discomfort.
* Set a realistic pace to work at when doing repetitive tasks

**Legal requirements**

All employers have a duty to provide a healthy and safe workplace for their employees, this includes:

* Providing appropriately designed equipment for the job, i.e. appropriately sized work benches
* Making sure employees are trained in safe work practices, i.e. correct posture and the use of tools.
* Ensuring tools used for repetitive tasks are ergonomically sound, i.e. comfortable size, weight and shape.
* Regularly maintaining equipment.
* Considering workplace health and safety implications for any new equipment before purchase.
* Keeping a record of all reported WHS incidents, including OOS.
* Taking steps to stop or alleviate the aggravating factors in the workers’ job design.

SafeWork Australia has published a [code of practice](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/ABOUTSAFEWORKAUSTRALIA/WHATWEDO/PUBLICATIONS/Pages/ACCP199406PreventionOfOveruseSyndrome.aspx) on the prevention of occupational overuse syndrome. This code of practice can be found in the Resources Tab of this course.

Source: Workplace OHS website, http://www.workplaceohs.com.au/hazards/work-health