



Health and Safety Toolbox Talks

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TOOLBOX TALK:

Managing Pain at Work

Speaker: Safety Manager/Foreman

Audience: Workers

I. Introduction

5 min

About 70% of construction workers work every day with some degree of musculoskeletal pain.¹ The goals of today's Toolbox Talk are to:

- **Goal 1:** Provide strategies for how to manage your pain
- **Goal 2:** Understand the factors at work that may cause or exacerbate pain

Construction workers are like “industrial athletes”. Just as athletes get help to manage their injuries and pain to get back on the field, construction workers need help to manage their pain too. What are some of the methods you use to relieve pain that you experience at work?

II. Strategies for Managing Pain at Work

5 min

When thinking about how your work affects your pain, consider the following questions:

1. How is your work set up?
2. Could you modify your work so that you are reducing the load on your body?
3. Do you feel comfortable asking for job accommodations at work so that you are able to manage your pain and keep working?

With the answers to those questions in mind, what are some job accommodations that you could put into place to lessen the chance of injury?
(*Note to presenter: encourage discussion, then explain the following points if not already mentioned*)

- Ask for tools that relieve stress on the body (e.g., lighter tools)
- Take micro-breaks (a minute or two) to stretch or break up repetitive or heavy lifting tasks
- Rotate or break up tasks that are repetitive, forceful, or that require heavy lifting or long exposures to vibration

III. Over-the-counter Medications

1-2 min

Does your pain get so bad that you feel you need to take something to manage it?
What do you use to manage your pain?

- Discuss pain that lasts more than a few days with your doctor. Ask for non-addictive pain medications to avoid highly addictive opioid-based medications. There are many alternatives available that can help manage musculoskeletal pain.

IV. Non-pharmacological Strategies

1-2 min

There is research supporting the use of acupuncture, chiropractic treatment, physical therapy, and exercise. Check with your health insurer, as many of these are often covered. Free classes might also be available through your town council or community center for tai-chi or yoga.

Other affordable options that have been shown to benefit muscle pain, include:

- Heat pads or heat packs
- Epsom salt baths
- Stretching

IV. Conclusions

2 min

Main takeaways:

- There are various ways to manage pain at work and at home
- Improving how your work is set up reduced the risk of injury in the first place and can lessen existing pains
- There are non-pharmaceutical strategies that can help reduce pain

Please take note of the various resources related to pain management that we have provided on the toolbox talk card. If you have any questions about what we discussed today, please reach out to the safety manager or your foreman.

Are there any questions?

Thanks for your time!

Sources

1. Caban-Martinez, A.J.; Lowe, K.A.; Herrick, R.; et al. Construction workers working in musculoskeletal pain and engaging in leisure-time physical activity: Findings from a mixed-methods pilot study. *Am. J. Ind. Med.* 2014, 57, 819–825.

STRETCHES

Taking frequent “micro breaks” to do these simple stretches can help to reduce fatigue and injury:

Back lunge



Knee to chest stretch



Standing side stretch



Hip flexor lunge



Standing quad stretch



RESOURCES

on managing pain

Talking to Your Doctor About Pain Management

tinyurl.com/TalkingPain

Alternative to Opioids for Chronic Pain

tinyurl.com/OpioidAlts

You Can Manage Your Chronic Pain to Live a Good Life

tinyurl.com/ManagePainToLive

Stretches for Construction Workers

tinyurl.com/ConstructionStretches

