



## Protect Yourself—Stretch Regularly

*Simple stretch exercises can provide some protection from repetitive strain injuries.*

### 1. Looking at Both Sides

Looking forward, slowly turn the head to the right side, return to the starting position; turn to the left side. Repeat 4 times.



### 2. Abdominal Crunch

Stand up against a wall, back of feet touching wall. Push your stomach in to straighten out the small of your back. Hold for 15 seconds. Repeat 4 times.



### 3. Lower Leg Stretch

Hold onto a chair or table with one or two hands for support. Lunge forward while keeping back leg straight and toes pointing forward. Return to the starting position; repeat on the other leg.



### 4. Seated Hamstring Stretch

Sit on the edge of a chair, straighten the left leg with the heel touching the ground and toes pointing up. Keep the upper torso and back straight. With the right hand or elbow resting on right knee, use the left hand to hold left leg and gently glide forward slowly. Return to the starting position; repeat on the other leg.



### 5. Upper Leg-Cross Stretch

Stand straight with one hand holding onto a chair or table for support. Use the left hand to pull right leg towards hip while keeping right thigh vertical. If unable to reach ankle, bend and lift the leg as far as possible. Return to the starting position and repeat on the other leg.



*For additional resources and assistance, contact:*



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# WORK shouldn't HURT!



*A Union of Professionals*

## National Repetitive Strain Injury Recognition Day is upon us.

Not too long ago, most working people considered musculo-skeletal injuries (sprains and strains) as “just part of the job.” Times have changed and we’re all slowly coming to the realization that chronic back pain, back injuries, carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive strain injuries are preventable. In late 2000, the labor



movement fought for and won an OSHA ergonomics standard that compelled employers to protect workers from these injuries. Sadly though the OSHA ergonomics standard was rescinded by Congress in early 2001.

While unions fight to win those protections once again, we’d like to remind you of some things that you and your colleagues can do to prevent injury; and policies that your union can promote to make everyone’s job safer.

## Repetitive Strain Injuries

*Repetitive strain injuries (RSI’s) occur when a worker’s muscles, joints and connective tissue are overtaxed from routine, frequent and hazardous movements at work.* You are at risk for one of an RSI, if you have a job that requires:

- Heavy lifting.
- Carrying and handling patients and students (they are awkward packages).
- Twisting and lifting.
- Constant bending.
- Overhead lifting or reaching.
- Twisting, repetitive or deviating hand motions (tool and keyboard use).
- Driving for long periods of time.
- Standing or sitting in the same position for long periods of time.

Pregnant workers and those with chronic health conditions such as diabetes may be at increased risk of repetitive injuries.

The AFT Health and Safety Program has found consistently high rates of back, neck and shoulder injuries among our members who assist and lift patients and students. Our special education paraprofessionals, early childhood workers, nurses and other healthcare professional members risk career-ending injuries everyday as they care for others.

Heavy manual lifting and handling are a danger to custodial and maintenance personnel and food service workers across the AFT. Librarians, teachers, paraprofessionals, secretaries and other heavy computer users can develop RSI’s. And bus drivers must cope with poor seats, vibrations and awkward controls.



ERNIE LEYBA

## Prevention of RSI’s

*The only sure-fire way to prevent RSI’s is to redesign the job “to fit the worker,” not make the worker “fit the job.”* This approach is called ergonomics. We all practice ergonomics when we get in the car and adjust the seat, mirrors and steering wheel for our driving comfort.

An ergonomics approach requires looking at and evaluating the physical environment and the work practices for the risk factors described above. An evaluation should lead to designing out all the repetitive strain risk factors. This doesn’t have to be expensive or time-consuming and should always involve the workers who are actually doing the work. Common ergonomic solutions include:

- Adjustable keyboards and chairs for computer users
- Whole body mechanical lifts for healthcare workers and special education paraprofessionals
- Hydraulic lifts and lifting smaller loads in food service and/or maintenance departments
- Good, adjustable seats and controls for bus drivers
- Adjustable diaper changing tables in early childhood centers and schools

Ergonomic workplace redesign can also be an issue at bargaining time.

Human beings are “awkward” packages, they don’t have handles. No one should ever try to lift a person by himself or herself ... A common ergonomic solutions include whole body mechanical lifts for healthcare workers and special education paraprofessionals.

## What Can I Do to Avoid RSI’s Now?

*If the ideal, redesign workplace isn’t in your foreseeable future, there are still things that you can do to protect yourself.*

Some examples include:

- Reorganizing your tasks so that you don’t spend too much time doing dangerous repetitive motions. If you’re doing computer work, try not to spend more than 45 minutes at a time on the computer, before getting up and doing something else (filing, collating, etc.).
- Recruiting a co-worker or colleague to help lift a person. Human beings are “awkward” packages, they don’t have handles. No one should ever try to lift a person by himself or herself unless they weigh less than 40-50 pounds.
- Breaking down those heavy loads into lighter, smaller loads and making more trips when carrying material.
- Using an inexpensive lumbar pillow at your chair.
- Avoiding lifting heavy objects from the floor.
- Bringing objects being lifted close to your body and avoiding lifting and twisting at the same time.

And if you are exposed to the risk factors, it is especially important for you to take care of yourself. Get enough sleep (8 hours a night), eat well-balanced meals and get 30 minutes of moderate exercise a day (walking, gardening, biking, etc.).

