

Sewing Machine

Operators



Position that may cause pain

***Feel Better!
Work Better!***

- ▶ How to Prevent Job-Related Pain
- ▶ How to Adjust Your Chair and Other Equipment to Fit Your Body

There are many ways your work area can be made more comfortable for you.



These changes may prevent pain

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Is your job causing you pain?

- ▶ **Pain, numbness, or tingling in the shoulders, neck, back, and hands** affect many sewing machine operators. These symptoms may be related to your job.
- ▶ **Symptoms may start gradually** and many people try to ignore them at first. But if you ignore them, symptoms can get worse and become harder to treat. Inform your employer and get medical care right away if you have symptoms.
- ▶ **These symptoms may indicate a serious injury** that can interfere with your work and personal activities. They can even lead to permanent disability.



Why do sewing machine operators have these problems?

- ▶ **An uncomfortable work position.** Sewing work may force you to hold your body in the same position for long periods. If so, pain and injury can result.
- ▶ **Repeated or forceful motions** such as reaching, stitching, pinching, pulling – hundreds of times a day – can cause small injuries to muscles and joints.
- ▶ **Long work hours and few breaks** mean less time for muscles and joint injuries to heal.
- ▶ **Hard edges.** If the edges of your chair, work table, or table legs press into your body for long periods, it can damage nerves or soft body parts.

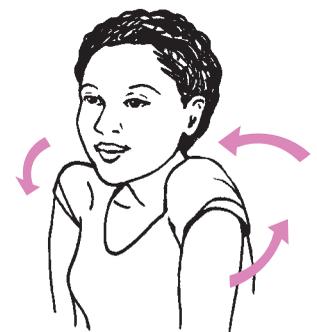


How can injuries be prevented?

By law, your employer is responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace.

Here are some things you and your employer can do to prevent injuries:

- ▶ **Talk with other people at work.** Do workers have health symptoms or injuries? Does the employer know about what to do to prevent injuries?
- ▶ **Provide adjustable chairs.** New evidence from health studies says that a good chair can reduce pain and prevent injuries. A good chair for sewing should:
 - Swivel
 - Have padded seats with padded adjustable backrests
 - Adjust easily in height
 - Have five legs (not four) and have no wheels
- ▶ **Use foot supports** for both feet.
- ▶ **Adjust your equipment to “fit” your body.**
(See page 5 – *How to Adjust Your Work Equipment for a Better “Fit”*)
- ▶ **Improve lighting.** Poor room lighting or shadows may cause you to lean forward in an uncomfortable position. If this is the situation, your employer should provide a “gooseneck” lamp, preferably with a fluorescent light because it produces little heat. Older workers are more likely to need extra light. Avoid using extension cords because they can cause tripping or fire hazards.
- ▶ **Check your vision.** If the material or needle is blurry when you are in a comfortable position, you may need prescription eyeglasses, contact lenses, or inexpensive drugstore reading glasses. Employers can help by providing vision care insurance.
- ▶ **Make reaching easier.**
 - Avoid twisting your back. If you use a swivel chair, turn your whole body with it.
 - Reduce long reaches. Stack materials and finished pieces close to you.
 - Place bins and carts as close as possible.
- ▶ **Provide training.** A trainer/consultant can help and teach workers to adjust their workstations, including chairs, table heights, and foot supports. The consultant can train a few workers to assist their co-workers. Each worker should also know the early warning symptoms of injuries.
- ▶ **Take short rest breaks** for a few minutes every hour during the workday to stand up, stretch, and walk around. Short rest breaks can help your body recover from work stress and keep you from getting serious injuries. You will probably find that you get more done, and feel better, too.*
- ▶ **Get medical care for symptoms.** See a doctor if you have symptoms of pain, numbness, tingling, swelling, or redness. (See page 2 – *Is Your Job Causing You Pain?*)



* In California, if you work a minimum of four hours a day, your employer must allow you to take a ten minute paid rest break for every four hours of work. See California Department of Industrial Relations at: www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/FAQ_RestPeriods.htm

Taking action to prevent injuries

- ▶ **Workers and management can form a safety committee.** A successful committee is one that has strong employer support. An experienced ergonomic consultant can provide technical assistance. Here is what a safety committee can do:
 - Talk to workers about their jobs and inspect equipment to identify conditions that cause discomfort or injuries.
 - Meet regularly to discuss problems and possible solutions.
 - Develop and test practical solutions.
 - Encourage workers to report work-related injuries to their supervisor.

Who makes regulations to protect workers' health and safety?

Employers must follow workplace safety regulations made by a government agency called Cal/OSHA. These regulations protect workers from hazards, illnesses, and injuries in the workplace. Some workplace safety regulations are: the Repetitive Motion Injuries Regulation,* the Sanitation Regulation, and the Fire Prevention Plan Regulation. If an employer violates such regulations, a health and safety complaint can be reported to Cal/OSHA. Complaints are confidential. Cal/OSHA can investigate to see if the workplace is following these safety regulations.

Cal/OSHA also answers questions about workplace safety regulations. Find Cal/OSHA's phone number in the blue Government Pages near the front of the phone book. Look under: State of California, Industrial Relations, Division of Occupational Safety and Health, Compliance or Enforcement, or visit: www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH/districtoffices.htm.

Cal/OSHA also provides a Consultation Service for employers (1-800-963-9424). This agency explains workplace health and safety regulations, and helps employers comply with them. They do not cite or impose fines.



* Repetitive Motion Injuries (Title 8, Section 5110), available at: www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5110.html;
Sanitation (Title 8, Section 3362), available at: www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3362.html;
Fire Prevention Plan (Title 8, Section 3221), available at: www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3221.html

How to Adjust Your Equipment for a Better "Fit"

- ▶ **Your chair and foot controls should support your body.** Adjusting your equipment to a comfortable position can prevent injuries.
- ▶ **The table height may need to be adjusted** by a mechanic to fit your body.
- ▶ **Team up with a buddy.** Help each other adjust your chairs and other equipment. It's easy to see another person's position. It's hard to see your own!



1 Check the chair seat tilt. The seat should be level, or tilted forward (higher in the back) if you prefer.

2 Adjust the chair seat height for the comfort of your shoulders, arms, and neck. Try to:

- Relax your shoulders
- Keep your elbows close to your body
- Sit upright so your head, neck, and back are not bent forward

3 Move your hips to the back of the chair.

4 Adjust the back rest to support your lower back.

5 Next, support your feet for the comfort of your legs and back.

6 Adjust the knee control.



For More Information

- ▶ **HESIS (Hazard Evaluation System and Information Service):** www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/HESIS. HESIS answers questions about workplace hazards and has many free publications available.

For information on workplace hazards: (866) 282-5516 (toll-free in California). Please leave a message and your call will be returned.

For HESIS Publications: (866) 627-1586 toll-free in California.

Guide to Getting Medical Care for Job-Related Pain That Won't Go Away. Helps workers recognize symptoms that need treatment; choose a doctor; and communicate better with health care providers, employers, and the workers' compensation system.

www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/hesis/Documents/jobpain.pdf

HESIS Publications List. Pamphlets and fact sheets on workplace hazards including chemicals, repetitive motion, and infectious diseases. Visit our website, call, or write for the list. A guide for health care providers treating work-related musculoskeletal disorders is also available.

- ▶ **Workers' Compensation.** If you are injured on the job, or work makes an existing injury worse, you may have a right to receive benefits such as medical care, wage replacement, and retraining (if a job change is needed). Benefits are available to all workers, including immigrants, part-time, piece work, and temporary workers. For free publications in English and Spanish go to:
www.lohp.org/Projects/Workers__Compensation/workers__compensation.html
- ▶ **Division of Workers' Compensation, Information and Assistance (I&A)** is a free State service for injured workers without an attorney. An I&A officer can help you through the legal process in simple cases. To find the I&A office closest to you, call the automated telephone service at **1-800-736-7401**, or go to the I&A website at: www.dir.ca.gov/dwc/ianda.html.
- ▶ **Cal/OSHA Consultation Service** helps employers to improve safety and health conditions without triggering enforcement inspections. Call **1-800-963-9424** for assistance.

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The recommendations in this fact sheet are based on research studies and published information, and on general ergonomic principles. They may not be appropriate for every sewing operation or individual worker.

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HESIS

HAZARD EVALUATION SYSTEM & INFORMATION SERVICE

California Department of Public Health
Occupational Health Branch
850 Marina Bay Parkway
Building P, 3rd Floor, Richmond, CA 94804
(510) 620-5757
www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/OHB

Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor
State of California
Kim Belshé, Secretary
California Health and Human Services Agency
Victoria L. Bradshaw, Secretary
Labor and Workforce Development Agency
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