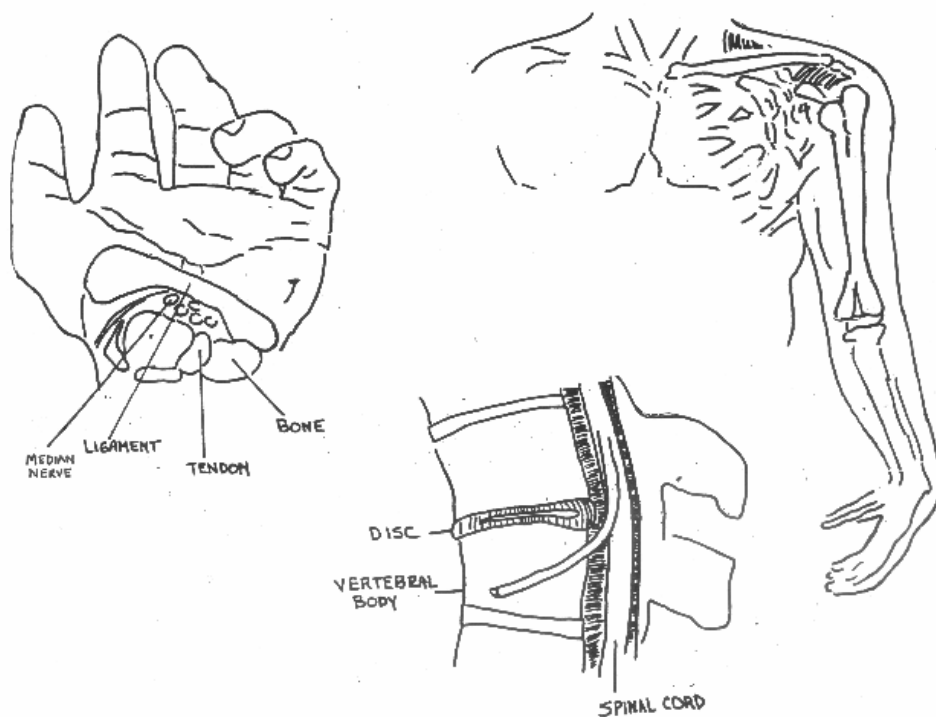




Musculoskeletal Disorders: The Biggest Job Safety Problem

Every year more than 1.8 million workers in the United States suffer painful back and repetitive strain injuries, also known as *musculoskeletal disorders (MSD)*. These injuries affect members of the USW in virtually every industry in which our members work. These injuries affect the *musculoskeletal* system – muscles, tendons, vertebrae in the back, nerves and blood vessels. MSD's injuries have become the nation's biggest job safety problem.



What is a Musculoskeletal Disorder?

Musculoskeletal injuries happen over a period of time – usually a little at a time – until pain, other symptoms and sometimes permanent damage result. They are

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different from *acute* injuries, such as falling down the stairs and breaking a leg, where the effect of the injury is felt immediately.

Because musculoskeletal injuries develop as parts of the musculoskeletal system get worn out from over use, they are sometimes called *overuse* injuries. Because many result from using the same body parts over and over in repeated motions, they are also called *repetitive motion* or *repetitive strain* injuries.

What are the symptoms of Musculoskeletal Disorders?

The most common symptoms of musculoskeletal injuries are pain, numbness, tingling, limitation of motion and/or soft tissue swelling.

When nerves are affected, the ability to move a certain part of the body may be affected and the sense of touch reduced.

When blood vessels are involved, blood flow to the affected area may be reduced.

In many cases no one but the injured person knows that the injury exists or how severe it is. There is no blood on the floor and often no bandages, stitches, crutches or other outward signs of an injury.

However, even though there may be no visible sign of injury, these injuries can prevent workers from being able to do their jobs, or in some cases, being able to work at all. They can also prevent workers from doing the most basic "activities of daily living" and force them to live in constant pain.

What Can Be Done?

Musculoskeletal disorders do not have to happen. Equipment, machinery, tools and jobs can be changed to eliminate the hazards that can cause these injuries. This involves the science of *ergonomics* – designing jobs to fit workers. No one should be injured or have to live in pain because of their work. Pain does not have to be "just part of the job".