

# Ergonomics: *Tips for a Stretching Program*

**PRE-SHIFT STRETCHING PROGRAMS** — are they for you? Many companies have successfully implemented pre-shift / midshift stretching programs for their employees. There are several good reasons to do so, for both your individual employee and your company as a whole. However, prior to beginning any new program it is best to determine what your desired outcomes are, how you plan to get there and what you hope to accomplish along the way.

If you are thinking about starting a stretching program, follow these simple steps to make your program a success.

- Plan. During the planning stages, determine what outcomes you wish to see from your program. Do you want to prevent all strain- and sprain-type injuries? Is this program being implemented to prevent workers' compensation claims, or is it being implemented to increase overall health of your employee base? Understanding the reason(s) behind the program will help you tailor it to your specific needs.
- Involve a professional. A doctor or physical therapist is strongly recommended. A medical professional will bring credibility to your program and will help ensure it is designed for success.
- Determine how you will roll out the program.
- Develop posters (and maybe cards) showing the stretches.
- Obtain buy in — get your management on board. This type of program will not succeed if management, from the top to the middle and everywhere in between, isn't totally supportive. Once management is on board, get buy in from employees. How you sell it will determine how well employees do with it.
- Educate employees on WHY the program is being implemented. Why are you doing this? Are there injury issues that might be prevented with this program?
- Identify stretches (based on individual jobs, tasks, etc.); and identify stretch leaders — usually programs start with supervisors as stretch leaders with the possibility of line employees taking over those roles.
- Schedule follow-up sessions (every six months at the beginning then decreasing in frequency) with the physical therapist or doctor to ensure everyone is using proper technique.
- Make it mandatory for the employees who most need it — those who work spend shifts in essentially the same position (sitting or standing) or who regularly lift heavy objects or get into “awkward” positions. And strongly encourage everyone else.
- Focus on good ergonomics and body positioning.
- Educate about positions or stretches to avoid (and why).
- One challenge is that all stretches must be safe and appropriate for all levels of employee fitness. Identify the safest positions to get the most out of them.
- Avoid stretches that put employees on the floor.