

‘Cumulative trauma’ injuries from work and how to avoid them

By James Yoro and Beatriz Trejo

In today’s technology-driven work life, it is easy to imagine an eight-hour day sitting behind a computer screen. Alternatively, we are exposed to long hours of standing or repetitive movements, which may lead to what is called a cumulative trauma injury, which occurs over time, as opposed to one caused by a particular event leading to a specific injury.



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California law recognizes both of these injuries equally. The following are some tips for avoiding repetitive trauma injuries in the workplace:

TAKE BREAKS AND USE THEM WISELY

No matter what activity you perform most in your daily work life – sitting, typing, lifting or bending, for example – your body is not likely meant to tolerate it for long periods of time. Make sure to take breaks from these activities by avoiding them. Avoid leaving your desk to simply sit in the break room. Avoid straining your eyes at your computer to check text messages on your phone. Instead, do what would seem like the opposite – like walking or stretching.

MAKE SURE TO TELL YOUR DOCTOR

The most common question in a cumulative trauma injury is “When did the symptoms start?” It is quite rare for a person to actually remember the first time he or she experienced any types of symptoms. For the most part, a person will ignore symptoms and simply attribute them to being tired or sore in hopes that they will go away. However, this is rarely the case. A cumulative trauma injury is one with a prolonged period of injurious

exposure. This means that whatever activity you are performing at work is causing your pain and discomfort and will continue to accumulate unless you change something.

STAY HYDRATED

With temperatures above 100 degrees, it’s easy to fall behind on liquid intake. Dehydration and heat exhaustion pose a threat particularly for people engaged in outdoor activities. The long Kern County summers makes this threat an ongoing issue that must be addressed daily.

GET PLENTY OF SLEEP

Sleep plays a vital role in good health and well-being throughout your life. Getting enough quality sleep at the right times can help protect your mental health, physical health, quality of life and safety. The way you feel while you’re awake depends in part on what happens while you’re sleeping. During sleep, your body is working to support healthy brain function and maintain your physical health. The damage from sleep deficiency can occur in an instant or it can harm you over time. For example, ongoing sleep deficiency can raise your risk for some chronic health problems. It also can affect how well you think, react, work, learn and get along with others.

Stress can impair your immune system and make you more susceptible to illness and injury. Often we are confined to the daily routine without proper rest, which leads to stress if an appropriate break or vacation is not enjoyed. Vacations are an important part of maintaining a healthy and long work life. Remember, rest and rejuvenation are vital components to avoiding injury from repetitive work activities.

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Managing five generations at work

By Robin Paggi

At the age of 80, my dad is the oldest person I know who is still working. However, he’s not the only person his age still in the workforce. About 5 percent of today’s workers include people who are 71 and older – known in generational terms as the traditionalists (born 1920-1945).



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Just shy of her 16th birthday, my granddaughter is looking for her first job. When she gets one, she will be the youngest person I know in the workforce and will join the 23 million people in her generation (born around 1990-2002 and called Gen Z, millennials and a variety of other names) who recently have or will soon start working.

Between the two of them, there are three other generations: baby boomers (born 1946-1964 – 45 percent of workforce), Gen X (born 1965-1976-ish – 40 percent of workforce), and Gen Y, also called Millennials by some (born 1977-ish-1989-ish – 10 percent of workforce). Although the dates and names of the younger generations are ambiguous, one thing is clear – trying to manage an 80-year-old, a 16-year-old and everyone in between is challenging. Perhaps the biggest challenge is that different generations need different things from their employers and supervisors.

For example, one Gen Y supervisor told me that she liked to meet with her employees individually once a week to give them feedback on their performance. As someone who likes continuous feedback, she thought her employees would like it, too. She was puzzled when one of her older employees told her, “Honey, no news is good news.”

The supervisor didn’t know what that meant. I explained that older employees were often used to a management style in which managers generally only talked to employees when they have done something wrong. So, “no news is good news” probably meant the employee didn’t want weekly feedback. In fact, the employee might have felt degraded by her younger supervisor constantly talking to her about her performance.

On the other hand, one baby boomer supervisor told me that she was fed up with a younger employee always asking whether he had done a good job on the tasks she had given him. I asked if the employee usually did a good job; the supervisor said he did. I asked if she told him so. She responded no, that he was so needy she refused to tell him. I explained that younger generations are generally used to getting more feedback and

praise from their parents and teachers, and that if he was doing a good job she should tell him so.

So, give older employees less feedback and younger employees more feedback? Why can’t employers and supervisors just give the amount of feedback that they want to and tough luck if employees don’t like it? Because of a basic life principle: If you give people what they need, they will probably give you what you need in return.

Quantity of feedback is just one of the many differences in what members of the five generations need. Unfortunately, limited space does not allow for more examples than the one above. Fortunately, there is an abundance of information about their needs at your fingertips, such as “How five generations can effectively work together” at www.reliableplant.com or at your bookstore, such as “Generations at Work” by Claire Raines.

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Of course, remember that we are generalizing when we talk about generations, so we can’t automatically assume things about people because of their birthdates. Remember, also, that this article is just an introduction into what employees might need because of their age. Employers and supervisors will have to learn about the employees as individuals in order to get it right. Is it worth the time and effort? I think so. When employees’ needs are met they usually do their jobs well. At the end of the day, isn’t that what employers and supervisors need?

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