

# Avoiding Repetitive Strain Injuries for Labourers

## What are Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI)?

Repetitive strain injuries (RSI) are a family of injuries affecting tendons, tendon sheaths, muscles, nerves and joints. They cause persistent or recurring pains, most commonly in the neck, shoulders, forearms, hands, wrists, elbows and lower limbs.

These injuries can be sustained not only by repetition of movement but by force, rapid movement, overuse, static loading, excessive strain, uncomfortable positioning of limbs or holding one's posture in an unnatural, constrained or constricted position.

## Who is at risk for RSI?

RSIs are increasingly common among a variety of worker groups, from clerks to jackhammer operators to assembly line workers and typists. Many workers overlook the symptoms as everyday aches and pains. This is dangerous as if the causes of the RSI are not eliminated, the damage can be permanent and irreversible, leaving the worker in pain and possibly immobile in that area for life.



## Causes of RSI

Any work that forces a person into an “unnatural” position can lead to RSI. Other factors contributing to RSI include excessive work rates, lack of job variation, speed, poorly maintained equipment, stress, overtime, vibration and inadequate training.

The causes of RSI can be classified in the following ways:

## Common Symptoms of RSI

- Numbness
- Tingling and burning sensations
- Pain, dull ache
- Dry, shiny palm
- Clumsiness of hands
- Swelling around the wrist and hand
- Wasting of the muscles at the base of the thumb
- Aches and pains, which may be strongest at night
- Rapid movement injuries caused by repeated rapid movements
- Forceful movement injuries caused by exertion of muscle movement
- Static loading injuries caused by fixed positioning with unsupported limbs

## 5 Top Tips to Reduce Your Risk of Developing RSI

1. Take breaks! Every hour or so, get up and walk around, get a drink of water. This helps to reduce the amount of time spent in one static position.
2. Exercise regularly! Exercise that involves stretching and flexibility, such as Yoga and Pilates, can be extremely helpful in this regard.
3. Watch your posture! No matter whether your job has you standing or sitting, stay aware of your posture and try and keep your spine neutral and your head balanced over your pelvis.
4. Be mindful! Pay attention to your tasks and how you are performing them. Sometimes we stray from doing things the way we were taught out of convenience but this can be detrimental to your body in the long run – remember, you were trained how to perform a task safely for a reason!
5. Mix it up! Vary your tasks throughout your shift, ideally every hour or so. This keeps your muscles from being overused or being held in a static position for too long.

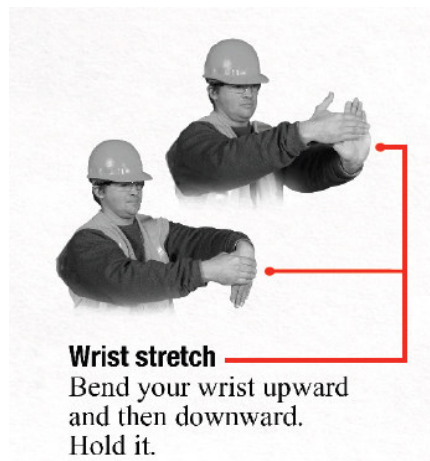
## Preventative Stretching

Take time during your workday to perform these stretches and reduce your risk of developing an RSI!



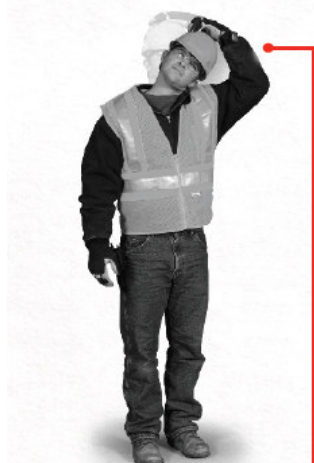
### Arm circles

Move arms in small circles. Switch direction. Roll arms in large circles. Switch direction.



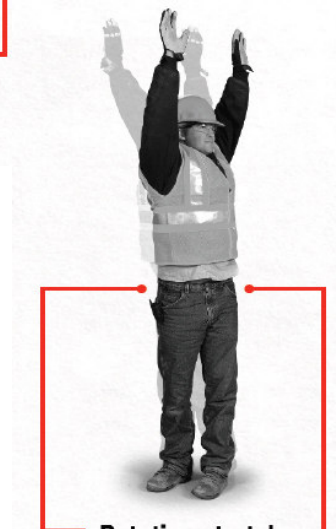
### Wrist stretch

Bend your wrist upward and then downward. Hold it.



### Neck stretch

Grasp top of head and bend your neck gently. Hold it. Switch sides.



### Rotation stretch

Reach up high and rotate at the hips in both direction.

Sources: [www.cupe.ca](http://www.cupe.ca), [www.stretchnow.com.au](http://www.stretchnow.com.au), [www.rsiwarrior.com](http://www.rsiwarrior.com), [www.sfmic.com](http://www.sfmic.com)