

WORKER DECONDITIONING FOLLOWING AN ABSENCE FROM THE WORKPLACE

This resource provides information to consider when returning to work sites after a period of time away. COVID-19 has required that many work sites temporarily shut down. As work sites reopen and employers and workers return to work, deconditioning may be a factor. Considering the information in this bulletin can help workers stay free of injuries and help employers plan reopening and worker reintegration efforts.

Key information

- Deconditioning is a loss of fitness or ability from a lack of activity which can increase the chance of injury.
- Deconditioning can be prevented and reversed.

Deconditioning and why it matters

Deconditioning refers to a loss of fitness or ability as a result of inactivity and may include reduced endurance, increased fatigue or reduced movement in joints. Research has shown that body changes, such as lowered muscle mass and lung capacity, can occur even within two days of inactivity.

Stay at home measures for the pandemic, or other breaks from the workplace due to seasonal work and shut downs mean that many workers do not perform their usual work for a period of time. Deconditioning can be prevented and reversed through exercise and regular activity.

Workers who have been off and then return to work sites may need to take additional steps to limit the potential for injuries such as stretching, getting adequate sleep, and being active to recondition themselves.

Musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs), also known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), is an umbrella term for a number of injuries and disorders of the muscles, tendons, ligaments, bones and nerves. Common areas where MSDs are experienced include the lower back, shoulders, wrists and hands, and often result from doing more than your body is able to handle at the time.

Staying injury free

Before starting work:

- Focus and pay attention to your body – Are there areas that feel stiff and sore from inactivity or a lack of your usual tasks? Are there things you can do that can help those areas feel better?
- Warm up – Just like starting a car in winter, your body benefits from warming up and getting blood flowing. A gradual build-up from low to moderate level activities (e.g. walking to climbing some stairs) can get your body warm and ready for activity.

At the work site:

- Employers and workers assess and talk about the hazards – Workers and employers must assess the hazards before work begins. It is important to revisit workplace hazards since being off the work site. Has anything changed? Is there a need for reorientation or updated training?
- Plan your work – Can any of the tasks be eliminated? Can equipment be used to lessen any physical loads? Can any lifting, carrying activities be added gradually?
- Communicate – Talk about how processes or the work environment have changed and what needs to be done to ensure health and safety. This can include stressors associated with returning to the workplace during a pandemic.

COVID-19 INFORMATION

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Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Report serious incidents, make immediate danger complaints, ask OHS questions

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690
- Edmonton & surrounding area
- 780-415-8690
- Deaf or hearing impaired
- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

File a complaint online

ohscomplaintsportal.labour.alberta.ca

Online incident reporting

Potentially serious, mine or mine site incidents

oir.labour.alberta.ca

OHS website

alberta.ca/OHS

For more information

COVID-19 publications by industry (COVID19-03)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/covid19-03

Hazard assessment and control (BP018)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

Respiratory viruses and the workplace (BH022)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bh022

Working at home during a pandemic (COVID19-02)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/covid19-02

Go to alberta.ca/covid19 for the most up-to-date information on restrictions pertain to COVID-19.

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