

WORKER DECONDITIONING FOLLOWING AN ABSENCE FROM THE WORKPLACE

When employers and workers return to work after a period of time away, such as a temporary shutdown, deconditioning may be a factor. 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.

Breaks from the workplace due to seasonal work, shutdowns or other situations mean that workers may 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 changes in processes or the work environment and what needs to be done to ensure health and safety.

COVID-19 INFORMATION

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Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Concerns, questions, reporting serious incidents

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)

Notify OHS of health and safety concerns 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

Ergonomics in the workplace: Identifying and controlling MSI hazards (ERG045)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/erg045

Hazard assessment and control: A handbook for Alberta employers and workers (BP018)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

Respiratory viruses and the workplace (BH022)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bh022

Working from home (COVID19-02)

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

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