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## MODULAR WIRING

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# WHAT INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS CAN DO ABOUT MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

POSTURE AND MUSCULOSKELETAL WELLNESS ARE OFTEN-FORGOTTEN ELEMENTS OF THE WORKFORCE. DR FARHAD SHAHZAD LOOKS AT WHAT EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES CAN DO TO STAY ON TOP OF THEIR PHYSICAL HEALTH.

**M**any of us have been working from home. With COVID-19 lockdowns not long gone, the issues of working behind an ergonomically unfriendly set-up may be catching up with us.

Prior to COVID-19, organisations may have put a lot of effort into educating staff about good posture and good use of technology, manual handling, and picking up machinery, but without HR hovering over you, back pain may be the result of long working days stuck to a desk without a good chair to support you.

Musculoskeletal disorders can be the result of bad posture and ergonomics. The most common of these, which is characterised as diseases of the connective tissue, is joint pain and bad backs are one of the most prevalent symptoms.

Perhaps you haven't worked behind a computer screen. Maybe you're out in the field, but back pain and musculoskeletal issues may still be a problem. Tradies are at particular risk of aches and pains because of the physical nature of their jobs.

Posture is an important facet of not only physical but emotional well-being. Just like facial expressions have a psychological feedback loop that feeds into our emotional well-being, so does posture.

When we are crouched, shoulders and head forward, and our posture stooped, our mood can be altered to reflect this. Likewise, when we are standing or sitting tall, head and neck straight, we feel a lot better.

One of the issues with bad posture is that it can lead to more headaches,

tension and stress. When our body is under stress, we feel tense, and this alters our mood, meaning we feel more angst than if we were relaxed.

## 'Tech Neck' and musculoskeletal aches

You may think that heavy lifting and bad posture are the root causes of musculoskeletal disorders, but things like using technology wrongly can cause issues such as Tech Neck.

Tech Neck is the name given to the tilting of the neck into an unnatural position with overuse of mobile technology, or any technology for that matter. You may think you're exempt as a tradie but think about how you use your phone daily but constantly facing down and tilting the neck can cause strain and back pain over time.

## Things that you can do to prevent musculoskeletal disorders

There are some things that you can do to protect your back and prevent Tech Neck and pain during your time at home. This includes doing stretches such as the exaggerated nod; simply counteract the forward tilting by tilting your head and neck back and squeezing your shoulders.

The very common Pilates pose, the downward dog, is also very useful. There are lots of YouTube clips to help you perform this stretch safely at home.

Holding your phone at eye level can also help ensure that you are not straining your neck. Ensuring that you're carrying out work tasks properly is also imperative.

When lifting machinery or doing any heavy lifting, ensure that you do so safely. Organisations should have strict manual handling procedures and ensure that these are implemented and observed by everyone.

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**Remember, it is far better for organisations to invest in the health of their staff than to face lengthy legal consequences.**

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Repetitive motions can lead to musculoskeletal disorders, so break up tasks where possible and ensure that you do things slowly and correctly. Cutting corners is unsafe, especially when there are clear safety guidelines in place. Likewise,

where machinery can be used instead of human labour, opt for machinery and have people managing it. It is better and more cost-effective than ill health.

Team building activities such as exercise, Pilates classes and stretching can also be a great way for staff to bond and protect their health. Buddying up can also offer greater accountability.

Prevention is better than cure, so ensure you do some simple exercises and stretches to help prevent back pain and getting a sore neck.

Remember, it is far better for organisations to invest in the health of staff than to face legal consequences. It is also better for employees to manage their health, ensuring greater longevity in the workplace. ▲