

Contributors



Sarah Ripplinger

Sarah is a marketer, writer, editor, and journalist. She brings us our cover story on mental health and construction (page 7) and a story on tower crane safety in one of our “WorkSafeBC updates” (page 25).



Gail Johnson

Gail has been working as a journalist since 1996 and has earned national, provincial, and local awards and nominations for her work. She interviews researchers hoping to improve spinal cord injury recovery with an app in “Work Science” (page 17).



Tom Ruffen

Tom began his career as a comedy writer at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in 1972 and has worked extensively as a print and broadcast journalist, copywriter, and video scriptwriter. He interviews wood fibre haulers in one of our “WorkSafeBC updates” (page 21).



Marnie Douglas

Marnie is a Kelowna-based writer and communications professional who began her career in journalism. She brings us a story on an innovative way to teach safety in the motion picture industry in one of our “WorkSafeBC updates” (page 23).

Ask an officer

Stopping worker sprains and strains in supermarkets



Brian Kossey

Occupational hygiene officer

Region: Nanaimo

Years on the job: 11

In this edition, we speak with occupational hygiene officer Brian Kossey about how employers in supermarkets can control the most common work-related injury in B.C. — musculoskeletal injury (MSI).

Q. What is an MSI?

A. An MSI is an injury or disorder of the muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, nerves, blood vessels, or soft tissue, including a sprain, strain, or inflammation. It can be caused or aggravated by the tasks performed at work, such as lifting, reaching, and repeating the same movements.

Workers with an MSI may become slower at their tasks, be unable to complete certain tasks, or miss work altogether. The injury could also have long-term effects on their health, including muscle strains, tendinitis, and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Q. Are MSIs preventable?

A. Yes, they are. As an employer, you need to encourage workers to report anything that could lead to an MSI. Early reporting is important in identifying areas of concern and preventing the progression of injury.

Q. How will workers know if they have an MSI?

A. Workers must be trained to recognize the symptoms of MSI. Signs, which can be observed, could include swelling, redness, and/or difficulty moving a particular body part. Symptoms, which can be felt but not observed, could include numbness, tingling, and/or pain.

Signs and symptoms of MSI may appear suddenly — for example, from a single incident — or they may appear gradually over a longer period. If you are experiencing signs or symptoms of an MSI, inform your supervisor and report to the first aid attendant. An MSI may be treated more effectively if it's discovered and reported early.

Workers need to work with their supervisors and managers to identify and control risks that could lead to MSI.

Q. What do employers need to know about preventing MSIs?

- A.** Tasks where workers have suffered an injury or show signs and symptoms of an MSI should be the highest priority for future injury prevention. After that, you should focus on identifying risk factors before injuries occur. A new job task or changes to the process are other high-risk areas to explore.

If the risk identification step reveals an obvious and effective risk control that will eliminate or minimize the risk to workers, implement it right away. For example, if a bakery clerk lifts heavy bags of sugar, you may decide to order smaller bags and store bags at waist height.

It's also important not to look at a task in seclusion. There is a cumulative effect of multiple risk factors within a task, or multiple tasks performed within a day. The cumulative effect is important when looking at the overall risk to a worker.

Q. We give our employees lots of stretch breaks, isn't that enough?

- A.** Stretching and rest breaks are great, but they are not the most effective controls for MSI. More emphasis must be put on changing the work environment or aspects of the specific task. Changes to the work environment can prevent workplace incidents and maximize productivity. For example, changing to height-adjustable workstations minimizes reaching and bending and could allow employees to work faster and be less fatigued.

Other changes to the environment could include tools, equipment (such as carts), written safe work procedures, and work organization or pace.

Q. Where can I get more information?

- A.** WorkSafeBC has some good resources and publications that can assist employers with managing MSIs:
- Workers can find more detailed information on preventing MSIs in the booklet [Understanding the risks of musculoskeletal injury \(MSI\)](#) on [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).
 - Employers can find more detailed information on preventing MSIs in [Preventing Musculoskeletal Injury \(MSI\): A Guide for Employers and Joint Committees](#) on [worksafebc.com](https://www.worksafebc.com).

Looking for answers to your specific health and safety questions? Send them to us at worksafemagazine@worksafebc.com, and we'll consider them for our next "Ask an officer" feature. ☺

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—Brian Kossey, occupational hygiene officer,
WorkSafeBC

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