

Aging workers

Why it's important

As workers age, hearing and eyesight weaken, it becomes harder to multi-task, it can take longer to perform basic tasks, and recovery time after an injury increases.

Balance and agility decreases with age, making recovery from a change in posture more difficult.

Bone density and mass decrease as a worker gets older. If a bone is broken because of a slip, trip or fall, full recovery may not be possible.

Reduced range of motion and slower reaction times are also factors for an aging worker. Because of this, a slip, trip or fall may result in a more serious injury than with a younger worker.

Overall strength and muscle mass decrease with age. Employers have to take into account the lifting capabilities of an older worker.

Workers may be in denial about any of the above factors and they may be resistant to any required changes in the way they work. Employers need to be aware of these sensitivities while keeping worker health and safety as their top priority.

How to control the hazards

- Proper material handling should be reviewed regularly to ensure that a worker is not placing additional strain on his or her body because of improper techniques.
- Extra attention should be focused on ensuring that all work tasks are done in the most ideal body postures.
- All manual lifting should be performed between the waist and shoulder as this places less stress on the body.
- Anti-slip soles on work boots can provide extra protection from slipping and falling.
- Scheduling rest breaks is important, as multi-task-

ing and keeping in focus can be more difficult for older workers.

- Fitness becomes more important as a worker ages. Workers need to ensure that they are physically ready for the job. Resistance training, proper nutrition and increase in physical activity all help to maintain a good physical condition.
- With changes in the workplace, older workers may find themselves in more physically demanding jobs. Employers should ensure that the physical demands of the new job can be met by the older worker and allow for a period of adapting to these new physical demands.
- **Show and tell**
- Explain what steps your company is taking to ensure the health safety of older workers.
- Emphasize that an aging workforce offers many advantages to the workplace. They offer a wealth of knowledge and experience and help mentor young workers. By being proactive and taking the steps necessary to accommodate, the benefits will outweigh any long-term problems.

Notes:
