

Ergonomics for Carpenters and Framers

What causes the pain?

As a carpenter or framer, there are parts of your job that can lead to physical problems like fatigue or pain when you do them repeatedly or without taking a break.

- Performing the same or similar movement over and over without breaks, rest, or time for recovery.
- Exerting force to perform a task or to use a tool.
- Working in awkward positions such as bending, stooping, twisting, and overhead reaching.
- Remaining in the same position for a long time with little or no movement.
- Continuous pressure from a hard surface or edge on any part of the body.
- Working in extreme temperatures, such as climate or those produced by equipment or machines.
- Sitting on, standing on, or holding equipment that vibrates.

Stressful conditions can also increase muscle tension and distract you from using proper work techniques.

Get ready for the job

When getting ready for a job, you should begin by stretching and doing exercises. You should also take a few minutes throughout the day to stretch, focusing specifically on your lower back, hips, arms, shoulders, and each leg.

Stretch slowly and hold each stretch for 3-5 seconds. Stop immediately if you feel any discomfort.

Working smart

When lifting things, keep the load close to your body. The further away from you it is, the more stress you put on your lower back.

Avoid heat illness by starting work earlier in the day. You can also wear light-colored and loose-fitting clothing. Be sure to take frequent breaks in the shade and drink a lot of water before, during and after work. It's important to drink water even if you don't feel thirsty.

There are a number of things you can do on the job to make things easier.

- **Lighten your load.** Plan what you are going to do and only carry what you need. Wear a tool belt that fits and distributes the weight of the tools evenly.
- **Protect yourself.** Avoid prolonged contact with hard surfaces and sharp edges. Wear knee pads, gloves, or cushioned insoles in your shoes for protection.
- **Select the right tool.** Light weight tools, such as titanium hammers, can help reduce fatigue and increase productivity. Choose tools that fit your hand and the task.
- **Practice good housekeeping.** Pick up debris and scrap wood to prevent trips, slips, and falls. Use gloves to protect your hands. Bend exposed nails to prevent puncture wounds. Good housekeeping allows you and your equipment to get closer to your work.
- **Know your surroundings.** Pay attention and watch for others working near you, behind and above you. Be aware of the tools they are using.

Signs that you have a problem

There are a number of symptoms and signs that may indicate an ongoing problem with the way you work. If you experience any of these symptoms, you need to change the way you work or the tools you use. If you don't, it may get worse and keep you from working at all.

- Continual fatigue or lack of endurance
- Cold hands, particularly in the fingertips
- Changes in the skin color of your hands or fingers
- Swelling
- Numbness
- Tingling
- Weakness
- Loss of sensation
- Aching, burning, or shooting pain

These symptoms can develop in a number of locations:

- Back
- Neck
- Shoulders
- Arms
- Hands
- Fingers
- Knees

Don't ignore your symptoms. Bring them to your supervisor's attention right away. Work with them to figure out what's causing the problem and how to do your job safely.

When you're on the job, there's a right way and a wrong way to get the work done. Below are some examples of the wrong way to do things, and ways you can work safer.

Working in a bent or stopped posture for a long time may cause fatigue and strain on your lower back, neck and shoulders.

- Change positions (sit or kneel with knee pads) when working at or near ground level.
- Alternate bending with non-bending tasks.

Lifting or carrying loads that are too heavy may cause a serious back injury.

- Use teamwork and plan lifts to coordinate movements.
- Use a cart to transport materials.

Working overhead and reaching for long periods of time may lead to lower back, arm, shoulder, and neck injuries.

- Use a ladder, scaffold, or scissor lift.
- Stay close to the work.
- Use lighter-weight tools.

For more information and additional risk management and prevention tools, visit: [fwcruminsurance.com](https://www.fwcruminsurance.com)