

Fact Sheet

Pain in the Workplace

About

Employers are concerned about the effect of pain on health care costs and premiums, and it is the leading cause of disability in the working-age population, with both private disability plans and the Social Security system being significantly affected. Each year at least 2% of the American work force suffers a compensable back-pain problem, with state and private workers' compensation systems searching for more effective ways to provide medical care.¹

“ Back pain results in an estimated 83 million lost work days each year. ”

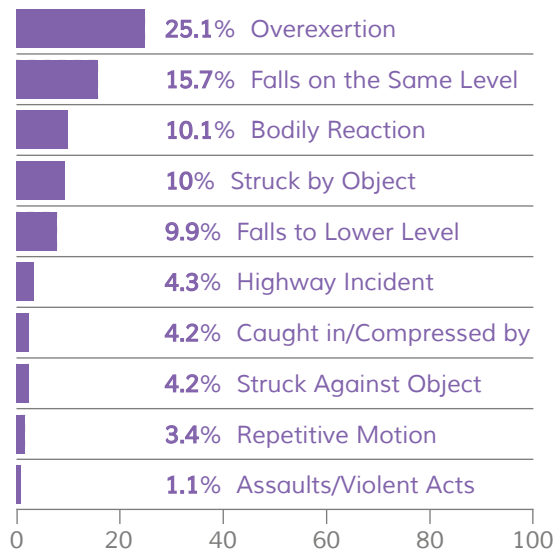
After the common cold, back pain is the leading reason adults under 45 years of age stay home from work. Back pain results in an estimated 83 million lost work days each year. It's one of the most common work-related injuries, especially among those working in physically demanding jobs, and the leading cause of job-related disability and work limitations in those under 45 years of age.²

Overexertion, falls and repetitive-use injuries are also among the most common forms of worksite injury. According to the 2010 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index, the cost of the most disabling workplace injuries and illnesses in 2008 amounted to \$53.42 billion in direct U.S. workers compensation costs, averaging more than one billion dollars per week.³

Nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses among private industry employers declined in 2009 to a rate of 3.6 cases per 100 equivalent full-time workers—down from 3.9 cases in 2008, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Similarly, the number of nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses reported in 2009 declined to 3.3 million cases, compared to 3.7 million cases in 2008. The total recordable case (TRC) injury and illness incidence rate among private industry employers has declined significantly each year since 2003.⁴

Facts

In 2008, the top 5 categories produced 71% of the entire cost burden of disabling workplace injuries. The top 10 causes of the most disabling work-related injuries were:³



- Overexertion \$13.40 billion (25.1%), including injuries caused from excessive lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, carrying or throwing of an object.
- Falls on same level \$8.37 billion (15.7%);
- Bodily reaction \$5.4 billion (10.1%)
- Struck by object \$5.36 billion (10.0%)
- Falls to lower level \$5.29 billion (9.9%);
- Highway incident \$2.32 billion (4.3%)
- Caught in/compressed by \$2.25 billion (4.2%)
- Struck against object \$2.25 billion (4.2%)
- Repetitive motion \$1.83 billion (3.4%)
- Assaults/violent acts \$0.6 billion (1.1%)

One study of employees with low back pain as a result of a workplace injury uncovered five main themes: justifying back pain at work; concern about future ability to retain work; coping with flare-ups; reluctance to use medication; and concern about sickness records.⁵

- The researchers concluded that workers with low back pain remained uncertain of how best to manage their condition in the workplace despite previous health care interventions and they were also concerned about the impact back pain might have on their job security and future work capacity.⁵
- They were also concerned about how back pain was viewed by their employers and co-workers and felt the need to justify their condition with a medical diagnosis and evidence.⁵

Data from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Injuries, Illnesses and Fatalities – 2009

Nonfatal injuries and illnesses, private industry:⁶

- Total recordable cases: 3.9 million cases in 2009
- Cases involving days away from work: 1.2 million
- Cases with job transfer or restriction: 800,000

Nearly 863,000 injury and illness cases were reported among State and local government workers combined in 2009, resulting in a rate of 5.8 cases per 100 workers—significantly higher than the rate among private industry workers (3.6 cases per 100 workers), but lower than the rate (6.3 cases) reported among these public sector workers in 2008. Nearly 4

in 5 injuries and illnesses reported in the public sector occurred among local government workers in 2009, resulting in an injury and illness rate of 6.3 cases per 100 workers—significantly higher than the 4.6 cases per 100 workers in state government.⁶

Approximately 3.1 million (94.9%) of the 3.3 million nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses in 2009 were injuries—of which 2.3 million (74.8%) occurred in service-providing industries, which employed 81.1% of the private industry workforce covered by this survey. The remaining nearly 0.8 million injuries (25.2%) occurred in goods-producing industries, which accounted for 18.9 percent of private industry employment in 2009.⁶

In 2009, the number of musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) cases declined by 9% to 348,740 cases and accounted for 28% of all cases for all ownerships, the same proportion as reported in the previous year. Declines in the number of MSD cases for private sector laborers and freight, stock, and material movers (decreased 17%); truck drivers, heavy and tractor trailer (decreased 13%); and nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants (decreased 7%) contributed to the overall decrease.⁶

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Workplace Injuries and Illnesses - 2009" October 2010. <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/osh.pdf> Accessed May 17, 2011.

Industries with the highest incidence rates (number of incidents per 100 full-time employees) of nonfatal occupational injury and illness cases for 2009 are:⁷

- Fire protection (local government) – 15.3
- Pet and pet supplies stores (private industry) – 13.6
- Heavy and civil engineering construction (local government) – 13.1
- Police protection (local government) – 12.7
- Iron foundries (private industry) – 11.3
- Nursing and residential care facilities (local government) - 11.1
- Hospitals (state government) – 11.0

Industries with the highest total number of nonfatal injury or illness (private sector) are as follows:⁸

- Health care and social assistance – 623,900
- Manufacturing – 480,700
- Retail trade – 475,000
- Accommodation and food services – 269,500
- Construction – 244,200

In 2004, 32% of “nonfatal” days away from work were related to musculoskeletal disorder.⁹ Sprains, strains and tears accounted for more than three-fourths (76%) of the musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) that resulted in days away from work in 2004. Other musculoskeletal disorders reported included:¹⁰

- Back pain/hurt back (5.9%)
- Soreness, pain, hurt, except the back (5.6%)
- Carpal tunnel syndrome (4.6%)
- Hernia (4.7%)
- MSD system and connective tissue disease and disorders, except tendonitis (1.7%)
- Tendonitis (1.5%)

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Workplace Safety & Health

1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333
Phone: (808) 232-4636
E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov
www.cdc.gov/Workplace/

Kaiser Family Foundation

2400 Sand Hill Road
Menlo Park, CA 94025
Phone: (650) 854-9400
Fax: (650) 854-4800
www.kff.org

National Safety Council

1121 Spring Lake Drive
Itasca, IL 60143-3201
Ph: (630) 285-1121
Fax: (630) 285-1315 fax
Email: info@nsc.org
www.nsc.org

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Postal Square Building
2 Massachusetts Ave., NE Room 2850
Washington, DC 20212-0001
Phone: (202) 691-5200
Fax: (202) 691-7890
www.bls.gov

U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA)

200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210
Phone: (800) 321-OSHA (321-6742)
www.osha.gov

Resources verified July 2011.

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