



REDUCING CLAIMS

What can employers do to reduce workers' repetitive stress injuries, such as Carpel Tunnel Syndrome, and lower costs of workers compensation claims?

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The American College of Rheumatology estimates that 3 percent of the population now suffers from carpal tunnel syndrome, and this is only one of many repetitive stress injuries. Ergonomic devices for employees work only if each device is specifically designed and customized for the employee and the employee actually uses it.

Carpel Tunnel Syndrome, a leading cause of work force disability, costs employers \$60 billion annually and the estimate continues to rise. CTS now represents 62 percent of all workers compensation claims. Seventy-three percent of workers suffering from CTS do not return to the same job, and retraining is expensive.

Employers should start with early detection and accurate diagnosis. Today, more than 50 percent of CTS cases are misclassified and consequently, as expected, 45 percent of CTS surgeries fail.

In the past, diagnostic tests for CTS have not been specific or sensitive enough to accurately determine if the person truly has CTS or whether surgery is the only option. During the past three years, however, researchers have studied a new, noninvasive device to measure and evaluate hand functionality. A five-minute test uses a 12-ounce handheld device to measure forces applied by the thumb, index finger and little finger.

New hires who may have early symptoms of CTS should be pre-scanned and assigned to jobs that would have less likelihood of injuring the hands. Now, employers have the potential to follow individual workers over time to monitor their hand functionality so that early interventions at the workplace can be considered to prevent injury.

The ability to evaluate recovery of hand functionality after therapy or surgery is now possible so that workers may know precisely when they can return to work and resume their jobs.