

How a Sonographer Should Apply Ergonomic Techniques Throughout the Workday

By Julie Kirk

Poor ergonomics in the workforce can lead to work-related musculoskeletal disorders. This is a serious, significant and all-too-common problem for sonographers. Examples of workplace activities that can cause these injuries are repetitive motion, forceful exertion, awkward movements, poor posture, uncomfortable positions of extremities, frequent reaching and overuse. The most common parts of the body in which sonographers experience pain and discomfort include: shoulder, neck, wrist, back and hand. Poor ergonomics will eventually guarantee one or more of the following: muscle spasms, inflammation, swelling, loss of sensation, numbness, deterioration of tendons and ligaments, tingling/burning and visual issues, such as headaches, eye strain and blurring. The intensity of these symptoms can vary and will range from occasional aching to severe, disabling pain.

Improving ergonomics in the workplace can provide great benefits and lower the risk for work-related injuries. To decrease this risk, setting up an ergonomic work area will play a major role in alleviating these injuries. It is also important that the sonographer understand proper and optimal body mechanics so that they can be applied to personal work practices. Simply paying attention to one's body as they scan is the key to successfully reducing injuries.

Recognizing and fixing poor posture is an important component of good ergonomics. Sonographers should realize when they are reaching or twisting while scanning and correct accordingly. Furthermore, if the table needs to be adjusted or if the patient needs to move closer, sonographers should work to correct these issues. Adjusting the monitor can help alleviate stress on the neck. The grip on the transducer should be relaxed and not tight and one's arm should be at a natural angle to prevent shoulder issues. Alternating between sitting and standing during exams can also help. Even with the most advanced equipment and ergonomically state-of-the-art work area, ergonomics will only be effective in decreasing musculoskeletal injuries if it is utilized properly.