

# The Economics of Ergonomics

## ***INJURY IS COMMON***

"Work-related musculoskeletal disorders are the most serious occupational health hazard facing our nation...but they can be prevented."

(US Secretary of Labor Alexis M. Herman. *Worksite News*. April 2000 pg. 5- Volume 8 Num. 3)

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that by 1993, Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) accounted for 60% of all occupational illnesses reported in the US—up from 14% in 1978, before computers became common in the workplace. [Computers associated with increase in RSI of over 400%.]

(*The RSI Network Newsletter*, issue 7, August 1992.)

A study of 1989 worker's compensation costs reported that low back pain disorders represented 33% of all Workers' Compensation Claims.

(Webster BS, Snook SH. *The cost of 1989 workers' compensation low back pain claims*. Spine, 1994(10): 1111-5.)

Almost 70% of computer users experience eyestrain. (Dr. Sheedy, James. *VDT News*, Nov. 1994. 1.)

## ***INJURY IS COSTLY***

The National Council on Compensation Insurance estimates that the average cost of a single RSI case is \$29,000. (Stigliani, Joan. *The Computer User's Survival Guide*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly, 1995.)

The cost of 1989 workers' compensation low back pain claims was \$8,300 per case.

(Webster and Snook)

## ***TRAINING PREVENTS INJURY AND SAVES MONEY***

Poor ergonomics at keyboard workstations can increase the length needed for rest breaks by a factor of three from 5 minutes per hour to 15 minutes per hour.

(S. Pheasant. *Ergonomics, Work and Health*. The MacMillan Press, 1991)

"Workplace wellness programs...are popular with employees, supply management with positive yet low-cost benefits for employees, improve both health and productivity in the short term, and reduce medical expenditures in the long term."

(Kenneth R. Pelletier, PhD, MD, Stanford University School of Medicine, *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 1996)

In the 1980's office workers in Australia experienced an epidemic of hand and arm injuries (repetitive strain injuries) which was subsequently curbed through prevention and early intervention. Australia's rate of injury and re-injury is now very low, and most who get injured recover completely. (Stigliani, p.64)

A review of worldwide wellness studies by the Canadian government found that workplace wellness programs have a return on investment (ROI) of between \$1.5 to \$3.75 per dollar spent. (Dyke, Dianne.

"The Wellness Package." *Benefits Canada*. January, 1999)

***Bodies that feel better get more done***