S&Z Sheetmetal

Safety Focused

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THE CINCINNATI INSURANCE COMPANIES

Preventing Tech Neck

While not an official medical diagnosis, “tech neck” has become a familiar phrase in today’s workplace. If you spend much of your day using a smartphone, laptop or tablet, you may find yourself looking down at a screen for extended periods. Over time, this posture can contribute to stiffness, discomfort and pain in your neck and shoulders.

What Is Tech Neck?

Tech neck refers to the strain placed on the cervical spine (the neck portion of the spine) when a person consistently looks down at a device or sits in poor posture while using technology. The human head weighs about 10 to 12 pounds in a neutral, upright position. However, when tilted forward at a 45-degree angle, the position many adopt while scrolling or typing, the effective weight on the neck can increase to nearly 50 pounds. Over time, this added pressure strains muscles, tendons and ligaments, leading to discomfort or pain.

What Can You Do?

In many cases, tech neck is preventable and manageable. Consider these tips:

- **Improve ergonomics**. Set up your workstation to support your body and reduce unnecessary strain. Position your computer monitor so the top of the screen is at or just below eye level. If using a laptop, consider a stand or an external keyboard and mouse to raise the screen. Sit in a chair that supports your back, with feet flat on the floor and shoulders relaxed. At home, avoid spending hours working on couches or beds, as this often encourages poor posture.
- **Follow the 20-20-20 rule**. Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. These breaks not only ease eye strain but also encourage you to reset your posture. Use these pauses to roll your shoulders, stretch your neck and adjust your seating position.
- **Strengthen and stretch**. Short stretch breaks during the workday can be particularly effective in preventing long-term strain. Simple exercises that counteract the effects of tech neck include the following:
    - **Neck stretches**—Slowly tilt your head toward one shoulder, hold for 15 to 30 seconds, and repeat on the other side.
    - **Shoulder blade squeezes**—Sit or stand with your arms at your sides. Squeeze your shoulder blades together for a few seconds, then release.
    - **Chin tucks**—Sit or stand tall and gently pull your chin back, creating a “double chin.” Hold for five seconds and repeat several times.

Additionally, make movement a priority throughout the day. Whenever possible, stand during calls, walk while brainstorming or simply take a few laps around your workspace. Even five minutes of movement each hour can improve circulation, reset posture and reduce stiffness.

Speak to your supervisor or a healthcare professional if symptoms of tech neck persist or worsen.

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Staying Safe on Stepladders

As the year winds down, you may find yourself using stepladders more frequently to perform routine tasks such as changing overhead lighting, restocking inventory, hanging seasonal decorations or updating signs and displays. While these jobs may seem simple, falls from ladders remain a leading cause of workplace injuries and can cause bruises, cuts, sprains, fractures and head injuries.

A few extra moments inspecting, positioning and using a stepladder correctly can help prevent serious injuries and reduce the risk of falls.

Fortunately, most ladder-related incidents are preventable, and following a few key safety practices can help keep you safe on the job. Consider these tips:

- **Inspect the ladder before every use**. Before climbing, take a moment to check for cracked parts, bent rails, loose or missing rungs, damaged spreaders and worn nonslip feet. If anything appears damaged, remove the ladder from service until it can be repaired or replaced.
- **Check the duty rating**. Every ladder has a maximum load capacity. Make sure the combined weight of the user, tools and materials stays within the ladder's rated limit.
- **Open the ladder fully before climbing**. Confirm that the ladder is completely open and that both spreaders are securely locked before stepping onto it.
- **Set up on solid ground**. Always position the ladder on a level, stable surface. All four feet should rest firmly on the ground to help prevent shifting or tipping.
- **Keep the ladder close to your work**. Position the ladder so you can comfortably complete the task without leaning or reaching beyond the side rails.
- **Look up before you set up**. Take a quick look above your work area for potential hazards such as electrical lines, fixtures, pipes or other overhead obstructions.
- **Always face the ladder when climbing**. Face the steps when climbing up or down, and maintain three points of contact whenever possible.
- **Keep your body centered between the side rails**. Keep your torso aligned with the ladder. Reaching too far to either side can affect balance and stability.
- **Reposition the ladder if you cannot reach your work**. If the job is out of reach, climb down and move the ladder rather than stretching or leaning beyond a comfortable working position.
- **Climb down before moving the ladder**. Never attempt to slide, shift or reposition a ladder while someone is standing on it.
- **Use a fiberglass ladder near electrical hazards**. Because metal conducts electricity, fiberglass ladders are the safer choice when working around electrical equipment or wiring.
- **Do not use a stepladder as a straight ladder**. The feet are designed to sit flat on the ground in the open position, not angled against a surface.
- **Do not stand on the top step or top cap**. These parts of the ladder are not intended for use as standing surfaces and can increase the risk of a fall.

Stay Safe at Work

No task is so urgent that it justifies taking shortcuts. Before climbing, take a moment to assess the task, identify potential hazards, and ensure your stepladder is safe, properly maintained, and being used correctly.

Reach out to your supervisor for additional workplace safety resources.



Live Well, Work Well

November 2026

The Right Way to Catch Up on Sleep

November is recognized as National Sleep Comfort Month, a time to focus on healthier sleep habits and the factors that affect rest. It's also a good moment to address a common question. After a week of short nights, does sleeping in on the weekend actually help?

First off, many adults try it. A survey of nearly 8,000 adults found that nearly half regularly sleep in on weekends, and the need is real. Adults generally need seven to nine hours of sleep each night, yet the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 3 adults don't get enough.

Missing sleep creates what experts call sleep debt, the gap between the sleep the body needs and the sleep it receives.

Catching up does work, but only partially. Evidence points to a sweet spot of about one to two extra hours, and studies have linked weekend catch-up sleep among short weekday sleepers to a lower risk of heart disease, dementia and metabolic syndrome. A weekend does not erase a week of short nights, however. Research has found that even six nights of short sleep can impair the body's ability to regulate blood sugar, and one small study suggests that recovering from a single lost hour can take up to four days. Sleep specialists say recovery takes days to weeks, not a weekend. As such, several habits can make catching up more effective:

- Add 30 to 60 minutes to your nightly sleep until you feel rested, instead of relying on one long lie-in.
- Keep a consistent bedtime and wake time, aiming for at least seven hours of sleep.
- Take an afternoon nap of under 30 minutes, as longer naps can leave you feeling sluggish.
- Keep the bedroom cool, dark and quiet, and avoid screens, alcohol and heavy meals close to bedtime.

Individuals who stay tired despite getting enough sleep may wish to speak with a healthcare provider. Conditions such as sleep apnea, insomnia and restless legs syndrome can interfere with rest, and each can be treated.

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Eat Fruit for Heart Health

Fruit is one of the simplest ways to support heart health. Eating fruit may help lower several key risk factors for cardiovascular disease, including high cholesterol, high blood pressure and inflammation.

Fiber is one reason why fruit is beneficial for your heart. The soluble fiber in fruit dissolves in water and forms a gel in the gut that traps cholesterol, which the body then excretes. Cardiologists note that the typical American diet contains very little fiber, so fruit can help close that gap.

Potassium is a mineral that helps ease tension on blood vessel walls and counter the effects of too much sodium. Researchers have reported that eating plenty of whole fruit may reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure. The vitamins and antioxidants in fruit may also reduce inflammation, which is linked to cardiovascular disease.

Furthermore, berries are a leading choice for their fiber, with raspberries offering the most. Blueberries contain anthocyanins, the plant pigments responsible for their color, which studies suggest can improve blood flow. Apples and watermelon are also among the fruits cardiologists recommend.

To reap the heart-healthy benefits of fruit, try to choose a variety of whole fruits, so you're getting a range of nutrients. Also, opt for fresh fruit since cooking or baking can reduce nutrient content. Fruit juice should also be limited, as it lacks the fiber found in whole fruit and can cause a sugar rush. Individuals managing a health condition or taking medication should speak with a healthcare provider before making major dietary changes.

Start Planning Now to Lower Holiday Financial Stress

While the holiday season often brings joy and togetherness, it can also cause financial stress for many individuals. Holiday costs tend to stay lower for households that begin planning and setting money aside early, whether the spending goes toward gifts, decorations, meals or travel.

The 2026 Holiday Shopping Survey revealed that 58% of Americans feel greater financial concern heading into the holidays than last year.

Experts recommend creating a holiday spending plan that sets a realistic budget, accounts for hidden costs such as shipping and wrapping, and prioritizes essential purchases to avoid unnecessary debt. Several steps can make the plan easier to follow:

- List every expected holiday cost, including gifts, shopping, entertainment, food, drinks and travel.
- Shop early to spread costs across months.
- Watch for sales and compare prices.
- Tighten discretionary spending a little each week and build a holiday fund ahead of time.
- Set a dollar limit for each person and track spending against the budget.
- Review spending weekly so adjustments can happen before holiday events.
- Pay with cash or debit to avoid interest charges that linger after the holidays.

Keeping these tips in mind can help households stay on budget and head into the holiday season with less financial stress.