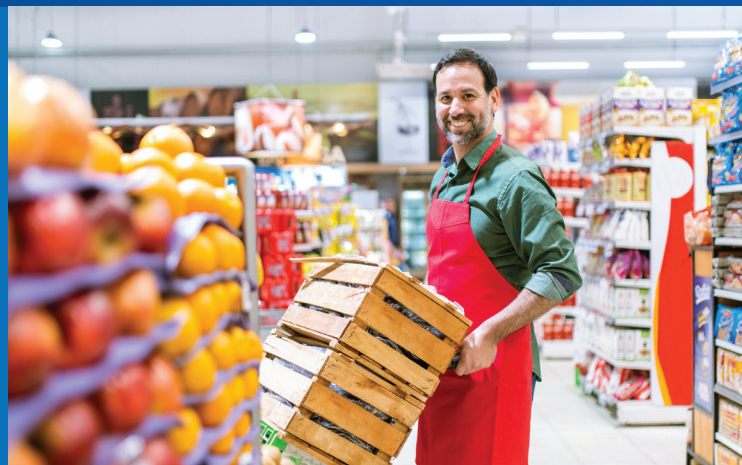


Occupational Health & Wellness for Grocery Workers

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HEALTHY WORKER SERIES 1.0

At first glance, grocery store workers don't seem to face an especially hazardous workplace. In reality, these employees engage in heavy lifting, operate power equipment, repeat tasks over and over and work in a fast-paced environment. Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) affect all sectors of the working population, and grocery workers have especially high rates. In previous studies, about 78% of grocery store workers reported work-related musculoskeletal symptoms in at least one body region, with most workers complaining of low back and feet symptoms. Approximately 11% of employees missed work because of symptoms and 25% sought medical care for symptoms.



The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics recently highlighted the significant safety hazards in grocery stores, placing them among the top nine industries with over 100,000 reported cases of injury and illness. These cases account for 29% of the 5.6 million total cases across all private sectors. A staggering 96% of these incidents at grocery stores were occupational injuries, with the remaining 4% being illnesses.

Repeated trauma injuries - including conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome and other motion-related disorders affecting the hand, wrist, elbow or shoulder - constituted 73% of all illness cases in the grocery sector, a rate considerably higher than the 50% average for all retail trade industries. In 2021, the statistics showed a concerning trend: 5.1 out of every 100 employees in the supermarkets and other grocery store industries experienced injuries. Among these, 1.5 of 100 employees sustained injuries severe enough to necessitate absences from work, job transfers or restricted duties. These figures underscore the critical need for comprehensive OSHA safety training.

Challenges

All of these actions put retail workers and stocking personnel at risk of significant injury. Grocery stores present an environment where employees are lifting, carrying and pushing heavy items, as well as standing on their feet for hours on end and preparing food. With heavy lifting, standing and close contact with hazardous food processing machinery, employees in this industry are put a greater risk for suffering an injury or illness. With food processing, customer service and other store areas bringing their own distinct hazards, managers and employees alike should be made aware of all the safety

measures that should be taken to reduce the chances of injuries. Ergonomic techniques can help employees reduce their chances of developing a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD), and developing a post-injury community partner and plan is integral.

Injuries are common in grocery stores and managers should implement effective safety measures to reduce the chances that accidents will take place. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 86,000 cases of injury were reported in 2000. Of these cases, 55,000 equated to workers having to miss work for one or more days, while 31,000 required employees to adjust their work, lifting lighter items or having to shorten their shifts. These statistics illustrate the threat that grocery store environments pose to the health and safety of workers.

MAJOR GROCERY STORE RISK FACTORS

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), these factors include force, repetition, awkward postures and contact stress. Force includes physical strains, such as heavy lifting, pushing, pulling and using equipment. Repetition comes in the form of continually performing the same series of motions, such as typing on a cash register. Awkward postures outline when stress is placed on the body by reaching high, squatting low or leaning over a counter. Contact stress is when the body is pressed, such as the hand against something hard, like a hammer. Acknowledging these common grocery store risk factors can educate managers on what compromises the health and wellness of their staff.

Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs) are potentially disabling conditions affecting workers. Of all workers' compensation



claims, WMSDs account for the highest percentage of costs and permanent disability among workers.

While WMSDs affect all sectors of the working population, grocery workers have especially high MSD rates. WMSDs are so prevalent among grocery workers that reducing the incidence and severity is Strategic Goal #1 of the Wholesale and Retail Sector National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) NORA Wholesale (NIOSH, 2009). In Washington State, grocery stores had a rate of musculoskeletal injury 1.8 times greater than the state average and 5th in compensable upper extremity WMSDs (using the prevention index) of all industries.

Solutions

INJURY PREVENTION

- Pre-employment physical testing
- Drug screens via local urgent care
- Conduct regular risk assessments
- Provide comprehensive training programs
- Promote ergonomic practices
- Use technology
- Implement crowd management strategies
- Collaborate with suppliers and vendors
- Regular floor maintenance and clear signage
- Open communication and participation
- Evaluate and improve safety protocols
- Chemical safety and hazard symbols
- Slip, trip and fall prevention
- Personal protective equipment basics

Grocery retail work can be physically demanding as material handler's tasks involve manual lifting, lowering, carrying, pushing and pulling loads. Other studies show that repetition, overload, and awkward positions are also related to injuries of the human body. Inappropriate working tasks could cause MSD to develop such as low back pain, shoulder pain and carpal tunnel syndrome. Increased MSD is likely due to repetitive bending of the back, lifting and pushing or pulling.

COMMON REASONS AND TYPES OF INJURIES

In a 2003 study released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the most common causes of injuries that occur among grocery store employees include:

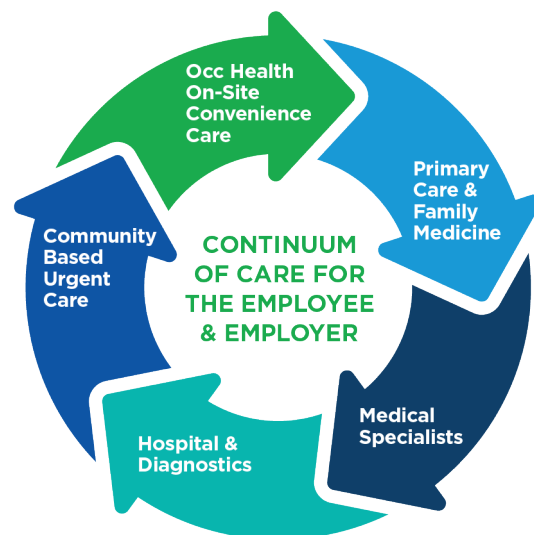
- Overexertion in lifting
- Overexertion in pushing or pulling
- Bending over or twisting your body
- Climbing or crawling
- Reaching for objects
- Repetitive motions, typing or use of tools

Sprains, strains and tears are the most common type of occupational injuries at grocery stores that require days off, according to BLS. Other common injuries include peripheral nerve damage and hernias.

The jobs most likely to cause serious injuries were cashiers and sales workers, kitchen workers and baggers/stock handlers. These three categories of grocery store jobs accounted for 62% of days missed due to on-the-job injury.



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Results

OPTIMIZE POST INJURY CARE DELIVERY

- **Access to care** with on-site or near-site occupational health is key to reducing overall cost and risk.
- **Prevention and wellness services** such as preventive screenings and immunizations.
- **Choose your occupational team** wisely by building your team with those who are familiar with the worksite and its challenges.
- **Diagnostics and testing** play a big role in determining treatment for the most serious injuries, and the time delays in receiving care can negatively affect recovery through prolonged wait times, degraded health and discomfort.
- **Time to care delivery** to expedite care delivery for all injuries ensures less discomfort to employees and prevents downtime.
- **Continuum of care** with a trained medical team who are familiar with the company and the workloads of the employees.
- **90%** of employees with initial injuries return to work for their next scheduled shift.
- **90%** of lower back pain cases do not need X-rays.
- We see significant injuries on the same day. For non-urgent injuries, we see them within three days or less.
- **92%** of urgent care clinics maintained wait times of 30 minutes or less in 2015.
- **57%** of urgent care patients experience wait times of less than 15 minutes.
- When you're seen for health care concerns more quickly, you're able to receive a diagnosis and start appropriate treatment more quickly. Not only does this efficiency mean less wasted time for you, but it also means you'll be feeling like yourself again in no time. In comparison, it should be noted that national standards show that the average wait time at an emergency room is four hours.
- Studies show the treatment for the most common injuries and illnesses at an urgent care is equal to or better than the care at emergency rooms. Urgent care centers are also known for more personalized care. The walk-in urgent clinic is a medical facility that provides relatively quick treatment for acute illnesses and minor injuries. Urgent care centers are well known for being the first place people turn to for quick medical help. When most people think of urgent care centers, they automatically assume that they only offer treatment for non-life-threatening medical conditions. However, urgent care centers can offer much more to the public as a valuable member of the medical community.

Summary and Overview

Our hope with this article is to provide a better understanding of grocery stores hazards and their consequences on health, wellness and productivity. The use of urgent care clinics has proven to save money by reducing unnecessary ER use and hospitalizations while better access reduces downtime. Grocery stores that implement injury prevention and post-injury care that focuses on musculoskeletal and ergonomic concerns have reported reduced work-related injuries and associated workers' compensation costs. Fewer injuries can also improve morale, reduce employee turnover, encourage employees to stay longer and discourage senior employees from retiring early.



"At Bon Secours Mercy Health, we pride ourselves in assisting grocery stores, manufacturing and logistics operations determine the right solution for their employee health and wellness options. Whether it's an on-site or near-site solution, our staff have the expertise and passion to assist in risk mitigation, reduce claim cost and provide excellent care for employees."

Anne Dunnington
Vice President, Mercy Health Occupational Health Services

Learn More

To receive more information on how an integrated approach towards occupational health can help your employees, please reach out to us at: **Bon Secours Mercy Health, 1701 Mercy Health Place, Cincinnati, OH 45237, (855) 504-0424.**

