

# What are musculoskeletal disorders?

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are “painful conditions affecting muscles, tendons, and nerves.”<sup>1</sup> They include a number of problems ending in *-itis*, such as tendinitis, bursitis, epicondylitis, and capsulitis. Carpal tunnel syndrome is also a musculoskeletal disorder.

MSDs develop insidiously: fatigue, for instance, may turn into discomfort, then pain. If you’re finding it painful to carry out your daily tasks, that means the disorder is well established.



<sup>1</sup> [http://asstsas.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Mat\\_Pedagogique/2019-009-010\\_prevenir\\_tms\\_ppants.pdf](http://asstsas.qc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Mat_Pedagogique/2019-009-010_prevenir_tms_ppants.pdf).

## How do MSDs develop<sup>2</sup>?

**First stage:** you feel pain, but only when you’re working – it disappears when you stop. It’s a good idea to take action at this point. Your condition can be reversed.

**Second stage:** the pain continues after you stop working. Your capacities are reduced, and work is increasingly difficult. This is often the point at which people go for help. There’s still time to act on workplace factors; your condition can still be reversed.

**Third stage:** your pain is now permanent and intense. It’s hard to do your job, and your daily activities are disrupted. Pain interferes with your sleep. It’s never too late to address the problem, but at this stage, there’s a high risk of prolonged absence from work, and you may also experience after-effects.

MSDs are injuries that are difficult to heal and that can easily turn into chronic pain. Prevention is the best cure.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.santeau travail.qc.ca/web/rspat/dossiers/tms/comment-se-developpe-un-tms>.

## What are the risk factors?

APTS members are exposed to a number of risk factors that may cause work-related MSDs.

### Ergonomic risk factors

- Restrictive or static postures, or repetitive movements: working with a microscope or pipette, taking blood samples, carrying out dental cleanings, conducting ultrasound tests, etc.
- Badly arranged workstations: counters are too low, keyboard and screen are wrongly placed, etc.
- Excessive effort: lifting patients, carrying heavy loads, removing equipment from the trunk of a vehicle, etc.

### Psychosocial risk factors

Psychosocial risk factors, such as a lack of recognition (from peers, supervisors, or clients), a lack of job satisfaction, a heavy workload, or a lack of autonomous decision-making, can create stress for workers.

“The impact of stress on MSDs is felt in many different ways. Tightening and pressure increase, along with muscular tension, and recovery times are longer. Stress amplifies perceived pain and makes employees more vulnerable to MSD risk factors.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.inrs.fr/risques/tms-troubles-musculosquelettiques/facteurs-risque.html>.

## What preventive measures should be taken<sup>4</sup>?

Because MSDs can be so severe, prevention is crucial. Hazards must be identified and eliminated at the source, and employees who are already affected must be helped.

The employer needs to act on a variety of factors. The following actions, among others, are required:

- Inspect the workplace in terms of ergonomics, and carry out improvements.
- Regularly monitor the measures taken to adapt workstations in order to prevent workers from developing MSDs.
- Make sure that workers are properly trained and have access to appropriate equipment.
- Analyze organizational practices in order to reduce constraints and prevent MSDs.
- Consider psychosocial risks.

As for employees, they must ensure their safety at work by adopting good postures and work methods, by notifying the employer and the OHS committee as soon as they become aware of risks, and by filling out incident/accident report forms as necessary.

<sup>4</sup> [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Lf31cN4IS\\_BdgC0FsXVRS8D9b7oz5rFL/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Lf31cN4IS_BdgC0FsXVRS8D9b7oz5rFL/view) and <http://asstsas.qc.ca/publication/prevention-des-troubles-musculosquelettiques-tms-dans-le-secteur-de-la-sante-et-des>.

## What are the employer's obligations?

According to Article 51 of the *Act respecting occupational health and safety*<sup>5</sup>:

*Every employer must take the necessary measures to protect the health and ensure the safety and physical well-being of his worker. He must, in particular,*

- (1)** *see that the establishments under his authority are so equipped and laid out as to ensure the protection of the worker;*
- (3)** *ensure that the organization of the work and the working procedures and techniques do not adversely affect the safety or health of the worker;*
- (5)** *use methods and techniques intended for the identification, control and elimination of risks [...];*
- (7)** *supply safety equipment and see that it is kept in good condition;*
- (9)** *provide [the worker] with the appropriate training, assistance or supervision to ensure that he possesses the skill and knowledge required to safely perform the work assigned to him.*

Your employer needs to comply with the Act, and this is an argument you can use to get him to take concrete steps that will prevent the emergence of a musculoskeletal disorder. You can also mention the *Regulation respecting occupational health and safety*,<sup>6</sup> which includes provisions relating to ergonomic measures (articles 166 to 170).

<sup>5</sup> *Act respecting occupational health and safety*, CQLR, c. S-2.1, art. 51.

<sup>6</sup> *Regulation respecting occupational health and safety*, CQLR, c. S-2.1, r.13., art. 166-170.

## What should I do if my employer is not meeting his obligations?

If you have a musculoskeletal disorder, or if you're at risk of developing one, contact your local team for help in dealing with your employer.