Discomfort - What to do should you experience it

By Dr. Neil Speth and Janet Ford, PTMS

Most people experience muscle or joint discomfort from time to time. Discomfort typically signals either having exceeded normal levels of activity or having used body positions or movements not normally used. Examples might be discomfort experienced after doing extra yard work or after hiking in hilly terrain if only accustomed to walking on level surfaces.

Discomfort can occur from work activities. Discomfort that resolves after a few days is unlikely to progress to a level, requiring medical attention. If this occurs we can use discomfort to our advantage by assessing reasons for the discomfort. If you cannot identify the reason/s yourself, ask your supervisor or department safety coordinator for assistance in reviewing your work positions or habits. If additional assistance is needed, contact the ergonomics program at 734-6180. Often small changes at this point will resolve discomfort and prevent reoccurrence.

Recovery from discomfort can be shortened if symptoms are addressed early. Symptoms that progress to the point that they do not resolve over a period of time, or worsen, may require medical attention. If you feel symptoms are due to work activities, discuss this with your supervisor. Your supervisor can guide you through corrective steps that may help. Keep in mind that symptoms experienced at work may be a carry over from non-work related causes. If your symptoms are related to non-work activities such as: gardening, knitting, personal computer use, recreational activities/hobbies or household chores, seek assistance through your private physician.

Some simple temporizing measures to combat discomfort:

- Alternate tasks frequently.
- Change positions often.
- Stretch every 1 to 2 hours.
- Use ice or heat to try to alleviate or reduce symptoms.
- Consider short-term use of OTC Tylenol or Ibuprofen if health issues allow.