

SCF Arizona your business partner in Workers Compensation Insurance and workplace safety



Stable Footing

Avoid ankle sprains, strains with simple precautions

SCF Arizona your Work Comp Specialist

Provided by Mike Felix
Association Coordinator

Since the first steps we take as children, we tend to take standing and walking for granted – until one misstep causes great pain.

Among the most frequent workplace injuries each year are strains or sprains to the ankles or feet. Sprains are injuries to ligaments – the fibrous bands that connect bones to bones and stabilize joints. Strains are injuries to muscles or to tendons, which connect muscles to bones.

Generally, sedentary workers who slip, stumble, or otherwise take a misstep are more likely to sprain an ankle than a more active employee. Prompt treatment will speed healing and reduce the risk of further injury, but 20 percent of sprains lead to chronic ankle pain.

When a foot turns unexpectedly, the ligaments or tendons are stretched in a manner in which they are not intended. A turn of the ankle can happen at any time for many reasons, but major causes include:

- Working on uneven surfaces
- Inattention to footing when going up and down stairs
- Stepping on something on the floor that you didn't see
- Jumping over something, such as an irrigation ditch

The risk can increase when employees are involved in activities that involve lifting and bending. Individuals who use poor techniques or body mechanics, who are in poor physical condition, who have poor endurance or who fail to stretch and warm up before a physical activity, are more likely to suffer a sprain or strain.

With an acute sprain, the worker may experience localized pain that worsens with further activity. The worker will see swelling and possible discoloration from bleeding into the muscle. When the sprain occurs, the individual may hear a “pop” or “snap” and actually feel the joint slipping.

In the case of a strain, the worker may complain of pain, loss of function, change in sensation, or may feel a defect or swelling along the body of the muscle. Symptoms noticeable in chronic strains caused by repetitive stress include stiffness, soreness, and tenderness that may worsen gradually with increased use of the muscle.

Strains and sprains are classified in three categories by severity. Regardless of the category or whether it is a sprain or a strain, it is best to have a medical professional evaluate injury and to determine the best course of treatment.

SCF Arizona's Preferred Connection Network has more than 3,400 medical professionals experienced in workplace injuries. Arizona businesses that are SCF policyholders can refer an injured worker to one of these PCN medical providers, and in doing so will keep treatment costs lower, which results in less impact to the company's loss ratio. The nearest PCN provider to a workplace can be found by going to www.scfaz.com/pcn/.

If you would like more information on workplace safety please contact your Association Coordinator Mike Felix

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The most severe of these kinds of injuries can require several sessions of occupational therapy as it heals.

SCF offers these tips for avoiding a sprained or strained ankle:

- If work requires a lot of physical activity, be sure to stretch the calf muscles. Tight muscles pull on the Achilles tendon and can reduce the range of motion of the foot.
- Work on strengthening the ankles to avoid strains and to rehabilitate them if you have had an injury
- Try heel walking; wear flat shoes; stand on your heels and keep your toes high off the ground; walk with toes elevated for three to five minutes.
- Follow a regular exercise program.
- Wear stable shoes that provide support
- When working outside in fields, yards or construction sites where the ground may not be level, wear snugly laced, high-topped shoes that provide the ankles added protection
- Avoid wearing shoes with platform soles, high heels or any shoes that throw a foot off balance.

For more workplace safety information, go to SCF's website, www.scfaz.com to review and order safety cards and brochures or review SCF's "Safety Net" training videos.

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