

Ergonomics for the elderly

As baby boomers reach retirement age the ratio of employees to retirees will equalize over the next twenty years. Considering that the foundation of Social Security benefits is generated from the workers it is evident that benefits will be inadequate for future retirees. In order to endure, the elderly will be forced to keep working beyond the current retirement age.

As our increasing knowledge of the aging process brings about breakthroughs in life extension technologies, the elderly will come to play a greater role in the productivity of our economy. Upcoming ergonomic developments will be critical in order to accommodate the elderly as viable and productive members of the workforce.

With the physical restrictions that naturally come with age we can expect that many elderly would be regarded as having disabilities and the ones who are not technically disabled could be considered physically and mentally compromised to some degree. Therefore, any workplace modifications that serve to overcome limitations in strength, coordination, endurance, sight, hearing and shift adaptability will accommodate the elderly into the workplace.

Visual restrictions can be overcome with a greater dependence on verbal communication with regard to instructions and assistive technology such as audio recorders. Labels should be in large, clear print with large, high-resolution computer monitors. Voice recognition software is also helpful. Other modifications include paper holders and bookstands that allow for optimal positioning of written materials, voice mail systems for messages and raised edges along the sides of work surfaces to prevent objects from falling off.

In personnel with hearing limitations any audible information should be supplemented with some form of visual presentation. Whole body vibration transmitted to chairs should be minimized by utilizing anti-vibration seating surface. Ambient noise should be minimized through workstation design, isolating noisy printers, sound dampening etc. Workers should have vibrating pagers, visual call indicators and sound amplifiers on telephones.

The elderly should have their work environment arranged in such a way as to avoid unnecessary reaching, lifting and carrying. Storage systems with pull out shelves and workstation carousels help to keep frequently used materials within 18 inches of the body. Containers should be provided to break loads into manageable units and the employee should have the means to slide any materials over 2 pounds. Mechanical reaching devices should be available for accessing supplies beyond the reach of the worker.

With the preservation of their mental faculties and the advent of ergonomic innovations for staff, the elderly will find themselves continuing to play a dynamic and productive role in society into the later years.

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Courtesy:

<http://ergonomics.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ/Ya&sdn=ergonomics&cdn=homegarden&tm=9&f=10&tt=14&bt=0&bts=0&zu=http%3A/www.tcs.org/ioport/feb05/ergonomics.htm>