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America's Surprisingly Unhealthy Jobs

by Heather Boerner, for Yahoo! HotJobs

Forget stuntmen. Some of the country's least healthy jobs are in cubicles, hospitals, and restaurants. Are you at risk?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), it's not just farm laborers or police officers who have high rates of workplace injuries and illnesses. In fact, some common – and seemingly benign – professions have high rates of injury and illnesses that were severe enough to cause workers to miss at least one day of work in 2006.

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Danger in Some Workplaces

The following eight professions are among the highest in terms of injuries and illnesses, listed in descending order based on the number of incidents reported to BLS (in parentheses).

Construction Worker (125,120)

"Falls and problems from repeated hammering are the biggest problems," says Garrett Brown, an industrial hygienist at the California Occupational and Health Administration.

Office/Administrative Staff (83,320)

The biggest risk is repetitive strain injuries from typing, as well as illnesses from inhaling toxic printing inks and other substances.

Sales Staff (76,210)

These jobs may seem innocent, but Brown says salespeople fall from ladders while gathering merchandise, strain themselves carrying it to customers, get repetitive strain from typing reports, and even suffer injuries from malfunctioning displays.

Nursing Aides, Orderlies, and Attendants (49,480)

These workers can be exposed to everything from toxic chemicals in hospitals and nursing homes to strains from lifting heavy patients.

Janitors and Housekeepers (46,540)

The heavy carts many housekeepers push can injure their backs and potent cleaning supplies can cause illnesses, says Brown.

Registered Nurses (20,500)

Lifting heavy patients, getting hit by gurneys, or attacked by family members can cause injuries.

Waiters (9,520)

"Those heavy trays don't carry themselves," says Dr. Davis Liu, author of "Stay Healthy, Live Longer, Spend Wisely: Making Intelligent Choices in America's Healthcare System." He continues, "Everything is supersized, and waiters are carrying 5- to 10-pound trays repeatedly, sometimes up on a shoulder with one hand."

Computer Specialists (2,720)

"The ergonomic problem here is not only typing, but also workplace design," says Brown. "Sometimes they squeeze tall people into small spaces."

What You Can Do

Experts offer four simple suggestions for preventing illness and injury that apply to most professions.

1. Work it out.

Even if you sit at a desk all day, treat yourself like an athlete, suggests Liu.

"When you get overuse injuries, your body is saying, 'If you want me to do this, you've got to make me really strong to keep doing it,'" he notes. "Or it will start hurting."

Work with a physical therapist, get regular exercise, and work on strengthening the muscles your job uses most.

2. Take breaks.

A lot of injuries result from not stretching or relaxing. Set a timer to go off every hour and take a break. Stretch shoulders, legs – any body part that's constrained by your work, suggests Liu. Then do deep breathing to de-stress before returning to work.

3. Double up.

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