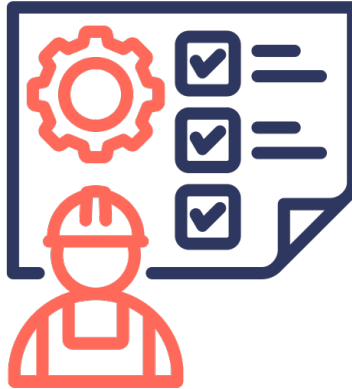


From The Desk Of Dr. Greg Weidlich



Keeping Your Team Healthy: A Practical Guide to Preventing Soft Tissue Injuries

The simple truth? Prevent soft tissue injuries by controlling cumulative load—so no body part gets overloaded faster than it can recover.

If you've spent any time in manufacturing—especially in wood products—you already know this: shoulder, back, and elbow injuries are part of the landscape. And here's what they usually come down to: *too much stress, not enough recovery*.

Now, let's be honest with each other. It's often unrealistic to fully "engineer the job to fit the human." The machines are fixed. The work is physical. And budgets? Very real.

So the goal isn't perfection—it's exposure control. And that's actually good news, because it means we have options.

Think of Injuries as a "Dose" Problem

Here's a helpful way to frame it: soft tissue injuries build when the *daily dose* of stress adds up faster than the body can recover. That dose comes from several sources working together:

Dose Factor	What It Looks Like
Force	Pushing, pulling, lifting, gripping
Awkward Posture	Reaching, twisting, overhead work, bending
Repetition & Duration	How often, how long
Vibration/Impact	Tool use, jarring motions
Insufficient Recovery	Overtime, understaffing, nonstop cycles

Here's the encouraging part: **You don't have to eliminate every factor.** You just have to keep the combined dose below the tipping point. That's a much more achievable target.

A Practical Approach When Engineering Is Limited

Think in **three layers**—and use what you *can* control.

Layer 1: Micro-Engineering (Small, Low-Cost Fixes)

We're not talking about redesigning the entire production line. We're talking about smart, targeted adjustments:

- **Adjust work height** — platforms, adjustable carts
- **Bring parts closer** — reduce that reach distance
- **Add slides or rollers** — cut down on carrying
- **Maintain your tools** — sharp blades and proper alignment mean less force required.

These fixes are often surprisingly affordable—and surprisingly effective.

Layer 2: Manage Time on the Toughest Tasks

When you can't remove the hardest exposures, **limit them**:

- Rotate by *body part used*, not just job title
- Cap overhead work, heavy lifts, and high-vibration tool time
- Build in short "unloaded" pauses (30–60 seconds) at natural break points
- Treat overtime and staffing as a **safety lever**—fatigue destroys recovery

Remember: it's not just about what people do, it's about how long they do it.

Layer 3: Use Discomfort as an Early Warning System

Make it *normal* to report early pain—and respond with action:

- Adjust the setup
- Rotate workers
- Maintain tools promptly
- Tweak the pace when needed
- **Track patterns** to find your true "hot tasks"

When people feel safe speaking up early, small problems stay small.

The Bottom Line

Even when you can't engineer everything out, **you can prevent injuries by managing exposure thoughtfully.**

Reduce the dose where you can. Where you can't, limit time and increase recovery—so tissues aren't overloaded faster than they can recover.

It's not about being perfect. It's about being *intentional*. And when we're intentional about protecting our people, the results follow.