

STAYWELL

www.intermountainpower.com

October 2019

Brian Coles, Health Analyst

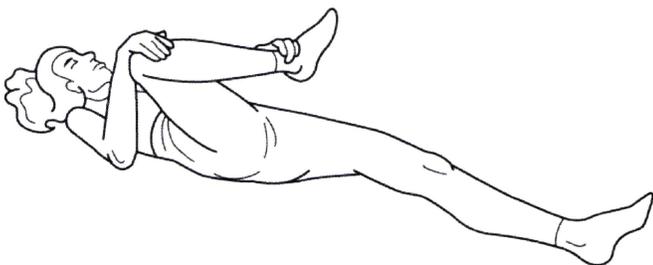
Volume 317

Lower Back Injuries and The Stretching Program.

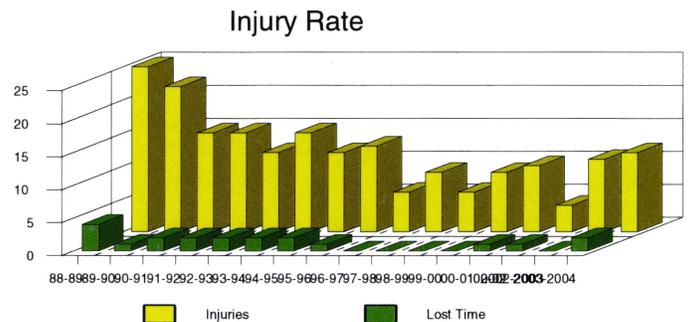
In 1996, the rehab committee took a long hard look at the history of work related back injuries at IPSC. Several successful steps had been taken in previous years to help the problem. The committee wanted to build upon those results and increase possible interventions.

The committee implemented steps to help curve the cost associated with lower back injury. The steps included:

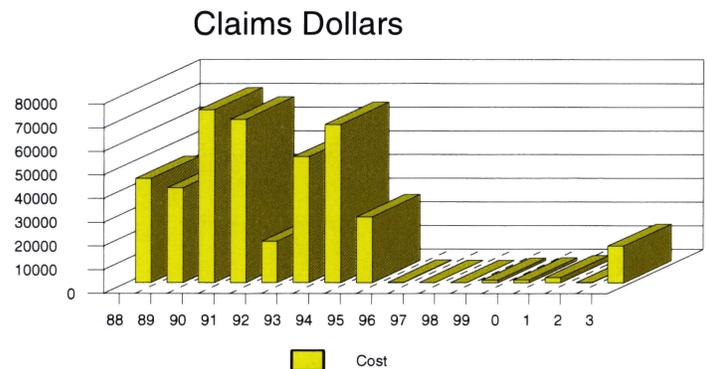
1. Immediate electronic notification provided to the company nurse and athletic trainer when an injury occurred.
2. Early treatment for all injuries, preferably directly following the injury.
3. Immediate referral to a physiatrist, versus a surgeon, for employees suffering a herniated disk.
4. Required annual back school and range of motion testing during Maintenance Training Block.
5. Early return to work with light duty accommodations.
6. Expand the morning stretch program (back stretching specific).
7. Provide supervisors with training how he/she can help reduce injuries, improve stretching, and assist to refer employees when injured.



Over time there was a continued reduction in lower back injuries, but there was still a significant number of injuries as shown in the following chart.



When someone did suffer a lower back injury the main outcome with reduced costs was not only significant, but dramatic. Claims Dollars dropped to almost nothing over the next seven years. See the chart below.



In 2001, IPSC followed up on some of the interventions that were implemented. This included an employee survey about the morning stretch program. The survey was conducted during the Maintenance Training Block. One hundred forty-nine employees who participated in the Maintenance Training Block completed the survey.

The results demonstrated that:

- Employees who participated at least one to two days per week, was 52 percent.
- Employees who reported there was time given at work to stretch, was 79 percent.
- The employees who reported they were encouraged to regularly participate, was 52 percent.
- Eighty-four percent felt it was beneficial.
- Ninety-three percent felt stretching reduced injury overall with ankles, knees, neck, etc.
- Ninety-two percent reported stretching helped reduce back injury.
- When employees were asked if they have had a back injury or regular back pain, 81 individuals reported yes and 90 percent of those individual's stated stretching helped manage the pain so he/she was able to work.
- Another interesting note was the Supervisor's role. Fifty percent of the Supervisors encouraged stretching and overall participation was 52 percent. A direct correlation? Quite possible. Supervisors play a greater role in employee wellness and participation more than he/she may realize.



We have all heard many things over the years about stretching such as, "stretching is not a good warm up." "Pre-stretching does not prevent injuries." "Stretching is more beneficial after working out."

The fact is these statements are true, but not in context. Yes, stretching is not a good warm up and just stretching before an activity has not been shown to reduce injuries. The true benefits of stretching are not to warm the body up. Proper flexibility has been shown to reduce the incidence and severity of injuries. Warm up means, to get a person's core temperature up. Stretching is designed to provide proper range of motion for joints, not raise core temperature.

A joint that is surrounded by a muscle that is too tight, results in damage. Many of the injuries to

joints seen at IPSC are the direct result of a muscle imbalance, such as poor flexibility.

The primary reason IPSC provides the stretching program is because, flexibility is important to the proper range of motion of a joint; especially the spine. When the hamstring muscles (back of thigh) are too tight, individuals have to load the spine more, which increases pressure and stress on the joints and discs, which increases the risk of injury. Staying flexible decreases tension on the joints and improves function. A flexible muscle responds better to stress and tension.

Through professional experience, those who are more flexible recover faster. It is easier to restore the range of motion than it is to gain the range of motion following a serious injury. Those with poor flexibility cannot tolerate some of the basic rehab exercises and struggle to recover. Flexible people do better during rehab.

IPSC allows employees to stretch for 15 minutes on company time. Stretching time will be determined by their Supervisor. Our own survey has demonstrated the effectiveness in reducing costs associated with injury. The results have shown a decrease in strain/sprain injuries.

Employees who have not stretched in a while are encouraged to start again. See Brian to obtain a copy of the stretches. Supervisors are asked to encourage their crews to stretch each day. Employees will be more likely to participate when they know their Supervisor is a supporter.

