

Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards 2020-2022

CASE STUDY



Improving ergonomics through multi-professional cooperation in the food industry



ORGANISATION/COMPANY

Suomen Nestlé Oy,
Turku factory

COUNTRY

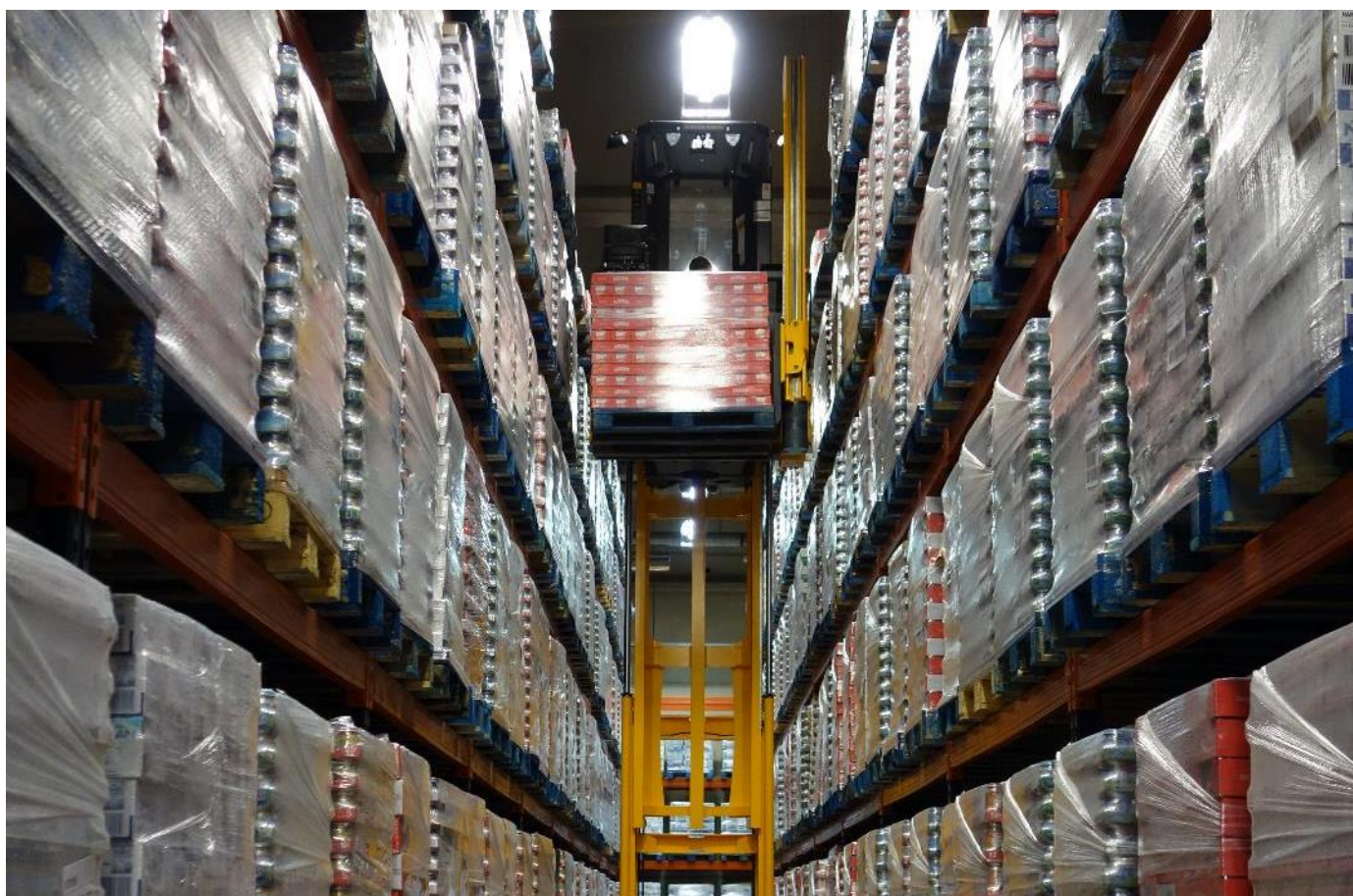
Finland

SECTOR

Manufacture of
homogenised food
preparations and dietetic
food (children's foods)

TASKS

Preparing, canning,
autoclaving, packing and
shipping food products,
which includes lifting,
pushing and dragging
heavy sacks/boxes



Source: Turku Factory

Background

In 2014, the factory's management team initiated an investigation into sick leave. Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) were found to be the main reason for absenteeism. Therefore, management decided to make a determined effort to improve ergonomics.

At the factory, the employees do shift work. Most production work involves lifting heavy sacks and boxes and pushing and dragging packages. These tasks are associated with awkward working postures and repetitive strain. Employees often work in hot and damp conditions and in a noisy environment. Identified stress factors also include the constant need for monitoring and repeated interruptions.

Physical exhaustion and pain adversely affect performance and also increase psychological stress, with the effects of this reflected in the wellbeing at work of all the staff, the safety culture and productivity at the factory. Improved ergonomics was seen as something that would benefit everyone. By investing in better work methods and conditions, the company not only aimed to prevent injury in the workplace, but also to improve employees' psychological wellbeing.

Aims

Through a variety of measures, the organisation aims to improve work methods and conditions to prevent MSDs, to support recovery for workers suffering from MSDs and to promote overall employee fitness and wellbeing.

What was done and how?

The management team at the factory decided to initiate a large-scale intervention to prevent MSDs. This included the participation of an occupational safety and health (OSH) organisation, senior management, occupational healthcare staff and all other employees. Besides MSD prevention, the company was interested in promoting practices to maintain fitness for work and support recovery.

To raise staff awareness, in 2019 management launched an ergonomics card project that involved disseminating general basic ergonomics training materials for each work section and factory operation. The material includes examples of ergonomics in production and dispatch, tips on recovery and how to sleep well, and guidelines for looking after physical health even when not at work.

In addition, the factory has:

- drawn up a list of questions for the safety discussions that the management team and supervisors have with employees regularly;
- acquired lighter equipment and machinery based on the recommendations of the occupational healthcare staff and by consulting the employees;
- encouraged keep-fit exercises and fitness practices by acquiring gym equipment for use during work breaks;
- updated the ergonomically correct procedures in the work instructions at the factory with illustrative photographs;
- practised appropriate ways of moving in practical training sessions run by occupational healthcare staff;
- provided targeted guidance for employees with similar problems (there is a shoulder group, for example); and
- clarified purchasing practices and responsibilities to speed up ergonomic improvements in the area.

The factory also promoted the return to work of employees with MSD symptoms through multi-professional cooperation among management supervisors, the workplace doctor, an occupational physiotherapist, staff and the OSH organisation.

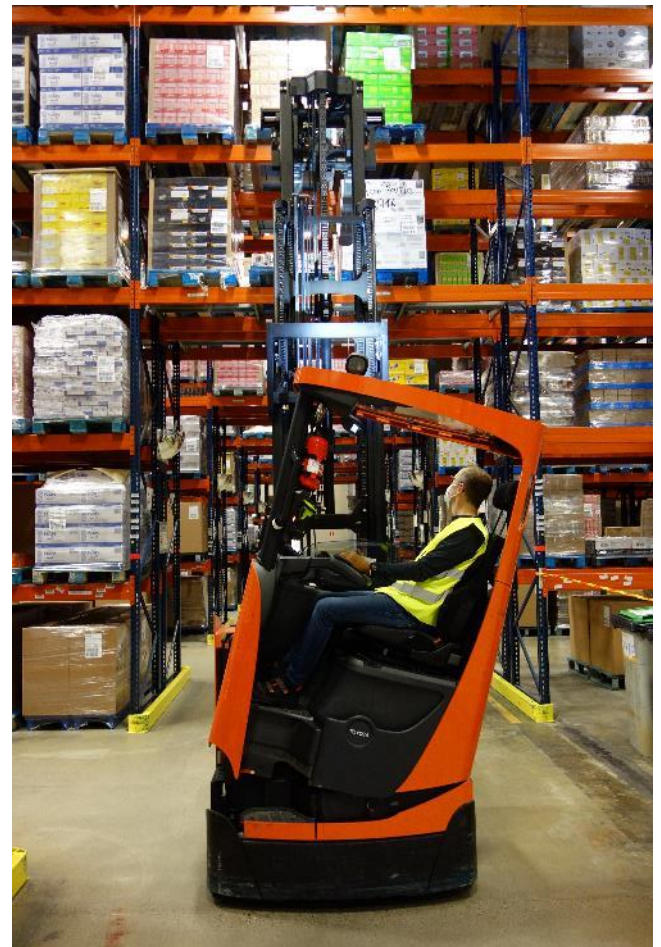
The key factors to enable staff to return to work have been to guarantee good care, instructions on staff rehabilitation on a voluntary basis, guidance and instruction on correct work methods and postures that put less strain on the body, working arrangements and the strong commitment of all concerned, trust and cooperation (see video 'Preventing musculoskeletal disorders at work', link below).

What was achieved?

Long-term, broad-based, multi-professional cooperation has improved the entire safety culture. The results can be measured, for example, in the number of accident-free days, the positive trend in the sick leave statistics and through wellbeing-at-work surveys.

Between 2018 and 2020, the number of sick leave days associated with MSDs dropped from 1,650 to 441.

There has also been positive feedback from staff about the genuine desire of management to listen to ideas and improve working methods and conditions.



Source: Turku Factory

Success factors

- Management's decision to make a determined effort to improve ergonomics in the workplace.
- Seamless cooperation with occupational healthcare staff.
- Interdepartmental cooperation: at each level of the organisation, willing staff are involved in developing ergonomics at the factory and making known the views and ideas for improvement in the area of the operation that they represent.
- Financial investment, to purchase equipment and in the scope and quality of the work of occupational healthcare staff, was seen as a significant contribution to making progress.



Source: Turku Factory

Transferability

The intervention can easily be adopted by other workplaces in other industry sectors. Many of the measures are transferable to large, medium and small enterprises.

Costs and benefits

Direct costs include the purchase of equipment and the training sessions from external occupational health specialists. These have been recovered many times over in terms of the considerable reduction in sick leave. The measures have also impacted the staff's general ability to cope and get through the day. Working together, they found ways to deal with their problems and prevent situations from worsening. The benefits and improvements achieved are also reflected in the staff's general wellbeing and their energy for their own free time.

Key features of good practice example

- The company implemented many different versatile and simple measures to prevent MSDs and to find solutions for people with existing MSDs to continue working.
- The role of leadership, continuous discussions involving the entire working community, and its impact on work safety and risk prevention are clearly defined.
- The commitment of the leaders to take action is evident, as is that of the workers and multi-professional occupational healthcare unit.
- The company provided training and materials on ergonomics, included ergonomics in the regular work safety discussions, updated work instructions, and rehearsed correct work movements and postures for work tasks.
- The preventive measures are taken in both the factory and administration office.

Further information

Further information can be found at <https://www.nestle.fi>

References and resources

'Preventing musculoskeletal disorders at work' (subtitles in English) presents the measures taken at the Turku factories. The video was produced in cooperation with Nestlé Turku and the Centre for Occupational Safety sector group.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xv4eHp_wMI0&t=4s

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