



*Are you ready for the  
mature workforce?*

*Eyes, Ears,  
& Voice of Retailers*



Human Resource Magazine reports that in 2012, the 50+ age group became one third of the labor force. The magazine also reports that of the top 15 jobs held by workers 65+, retail ranks 3rd and for the 55-64 group retail ranks 8th. As that workforce ages, employers need to better understand the best practices within the 55+ age group of employees.

This pamphlet will provide information which will help coach employers as well as employees on how to work smarter and reduce the potential for injuries. This information will:

- let you know what some of the changes are
- what the implications can be
- give you some solutions on how to work within those changes to maintain safety and productivity

Employers and employees can implement these methods to reduce injuries, benefiting the worker and the company as well, no matter what age they are.

The following pages show ideas that can be used to review your workplace and provide solutions to best help you.

Here are some age-related changes, along with safety and health implications and some possible solutions.

## **Strength**

Changes - Decrease in the number and size of muscle fibers.

Implications – Physical demands of some tasks may be near capacity. Weaker leg muscles may result in more use of the back muscles for lifting, etc.

Solutions - Reduce strength requirements for tasks through mechanization. Reduce the weight of loads lifted, store heavier items at waist level, or implement 'zero lift' policies.

## **Balance**

Changes - Decrease in postural steadiness and sensation.  
Decrease in leg strength.

Implications - Slips, trips and falls more likely. More effort required when walking, can result in more fatigue.

Solutions - Practice good housekeeping; repair and maintain floors. Use slip resistant materials on personnel lifts or platforms. Redesign to reduce walking distances or provide transportation.

## **Vision**

Changes - Ability to discern details - declines 26% by age 60.  
Restricted field of vision (peripheral). Loss of depth perception.  
Decreased ability to discriminate contrast and color.

Implications - Could cause errors, reduce quality and productivity in visually intensive tasks. May make it harder to read safety warnings, instructions, training materials. Could impair driving, forklift operation, especially at night.

Solutions - Provide light levels appropriate to the task. Provide magnification for detailed work. Use clear, large signage and written print; reduce visual clutter. Position gauges and displays well. Provide color contrast. Assess driving skills, machine operation skills periodically and provide additional training as needed.

## **Hearing**

Changes - Age related impairment starts around age 40, increases sharply around 60. Losses in high frequency range (5000 Hz) occur early. Difficulty hearing with background noise.

Implications - May have difficulty hearing warning sounds, such as back-up beepers. May have difficulty hearing warning shouts, safety instructions, in noisy environments. Could increase feelings of social isolation.

Solutions - Focus on hearing protection program to minimize hearing loss. Provide hearing protection such as ear muffs that can be used with hearing aids. Keep signals in a mid-frequency range, or alternating frequencies like a siren. Reduce background noise. Reduce echoing with good acoustics. Provide important information visually in addition to sound.

## **Flexibility and joint range of motion**

Changes - Tendons stiffer and more vulnerable. Ligaments lose elasticity. Deterioration of cartilage in joints.

Implications - Awkward postures and movements, bodily reaction, slips and trips more likely to result in injury. Flex and stretch programs may no longer be effective, might cause injury. Osteoarthritis may increase risk for other Muscle-Skeletal-Disorders.

Solutions - Position work and loads close to the body. Reduce reach distances by removing obstacles, reducing the size of loads, using "Lazy Susans", and so on. Use height and tilt adjustable work surfaces or fixtures to reduce awkward postures. Redesign stretching programs.

## **Light sensitivity**

Changes - Slower to adapt when moving between light and dark. Decreased tolerance for glare and bright light. Increased need for illumination for reading and precision tasks.

Implications - May not see hazards when coming into relatively dim interior from bright exterior, and vice versa. May be temporarily disabled by bright glare. Can result in more errors, reduced quality and productivity, particularly in over bright or dim light.

Solutions - Eliminate the need to adapt to bright light from dark and vice versa. Provide light levels appropriate to the task. Provide more individual control over lighting. Eliminate glare.

## **Chronic health conditions**

Changes - High blood pressure – Diabetes – Obesity- Heart disease  
- Cancer

Implications - May create fatigue issues. Some conditions, such as diabetes, can affect peripheral nerves. Obesity can change body mechanics, increasing the risk for Muscle-Skeletal-Disorders.

Solutions - Focus on health promotion to prevent disease, manage symptoms. Provide accommodations where appropriate.



Some other best practices are:

- Improve illumination, add color contrast possibly with more individual control.
- Reduce static standing time.
- Remove clutter from control panels and computer screens.
- Use larger computer monitors.
- Install anti-skid material for floor where needed, i.e. stair treads, to reduce falls.
- Provide step ladders with hand rails to offer better balance.
- Eliminate heavy lifts, elevated work from ladders and long reaches.
- Utilize hands free volume adjustable telephone equipment.
- Job support aids such as 'cheat sheets'.
- Consider necessary reaction time when assigning tasks.
- Look at work process/job re-design changes that better fit the worker.
- Increase task rotation which will reduce the strain of repetitive motion.
- Design work floors and platforms with smooth and solid decking while still allowing some cushioning.
- Lower sound system pitches, such as on alarm systems, as they tend to be easier to hear.
- Provide opportunities for practice and time to develop task familiarity.
- Table workspace that is adjustable.
- Reduce awkward and heavy lifting over 35 pounds by using mechanical lift assists whenever possible.
- Reduce background noise levels.

Knowing that there is no one-size-fits-all solution, evaluate each job and worker, so that you can increase workplace safety and productivity. You may even find that it will help all generations of workers.





The older worker adds value to any organization; *“At the end of the day, the cost differential for leveraging 50+ talent can be overcome by the advantages of added experience, knowledge, skills and engagement ... 50+ may also contribute to higher productivity among other workers by transferring the knowledge gained over their careers and by mentoring new employees. The modest differences in annual compensation costs could easily be dwarfed by considerations such as these.”*

Michael Silverstein Designing the Age Friendly Workplace 2009

Because each store and employee situation is different, the idea is to review the job tasks and incorporate the best processes for the worker, creating a safer and productive environment for all.

It is happening now, are you ready?

**Additional information on this topic can be found at  
[www.retailassociationservices.com/safety](http://www.retailassociationservices.com/safety)**



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