



LABOR CONNECTION

Summer 2026

Keep Muscles and
Joints Working as
Hard as You Do



When you work in the trades, you use specialized tools and equipment to get the job done. Your most valuable tool — and maybe the most overlooked — is your body.

Skilled labor takes strength, grit and resilience. It also puts daily stress on your muscles, joints and back. When you reach, lift, kneel, climb, use vibrating tools and repeat the same motions hour after hour, it can take a toll over time.

The National Safety Council reports a worker in the U.S. gets hurt on the job every seven seconds. Overexertion causes about 27% of these injuries. They cite injuries from lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling and other movements that place too much strain on the body. The back is most often affected. Strains and sprains are common and can limit movement, strength and comfort on and off the job.

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Keep Muscles and Joints Working as Hard as You Do (CONTINUED)

Falls, slips and trips add to the risk. They cause another 26% of workplace injuries and often lead to muscle and joint strains, sprains and tears.

Healthy muscles and joints

When your body hurts, everything becomes harder. Workdays feel longer, pain slows you down, sleep suffers and recovery takes more time. If you aren't careful, small aches can turn into bigger problems that lead to missed work and wages.

The good news is many of these injuries can be prevented. Simple habits and the right support can help you protect your body and paycheck and feel your best — both on the job and at home.

Tips for injury prevention

Hard work is part of the job, but aches and pains don't have to be. While everyone experiences soreness occasionally, there are simple steps you can take each day to reduce strain on your body.

Warm up before work. A few minutes of light stretching or movement before your shift begins can boost blood flow and loosen muscles and joints. Warm muscles are less prone to injury, especially during heavy or repetitive work.

Practice safe lifting. Keep loads close to your body. Bend at the knees and use your legs. Don't twist at the waist. Ask for help when something feels too heavy or awkward. One lift the wrong way can cause lasting pain.

Change positions when you can. When you hold one position for too long, it puts stress on the same muscles and joints. Switch tasks, stand up after kneeling or take short movement breaks to let overworked muscles rest.

Pay attention to early pain. Some soreness comes with the job, especially during busy seasons. Still, pain that lingers, returns or limits movement shouldn't be ignored. Soreness, stiffness and tingling are signs that your body needs support. Take them seriously.

Ease soreness before it becomes pain. Gentle stretches can help loosen tight muscles after a long day. Ice or heat may help ease discomfort, depending on the issue. Remember, rest and sleep play a bigger role in recovery than many people realize.

Act early when pain doesn't improve. If pain keeps coming back, gets worse or affects the way you move, see a provider early to help prevent long term problems. Physical therapy can help strengthen muscles, improve movement and support recovery.

Use the support you already have. Safety training, proper equipment and health care benefits are there to help protect you. Your health plan may include access to primary care, physical therapy or other services that support muscle and joint health. Using these resources when you need them can help you manage pain, recover safely and stay on the job longer.

Taking care of your muscles and joints is part of doing the job well. Over time, habits like these can help protect your body, reduce pain and support a longer, healthier career in the trades.

Sources:

Top Work-Related Injury Causes. National Safety Council Injury Facts. 2026.

Elements of Ergonomics Programs. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. 2024.

Most Common Workplace Injuries and How to Prevent Them. Wood County Hospital. 2025.

This and That

Did you know? Regular checkups and screenings help detect health issues early, often before symptoms appear. Taking time for preventive care today can help you stay healthy and ready for the things that matter most — your family, your work and your future. Schedule your annual checkup now.

On Labor Day and every day, we celebrate you — the hardworking men and women of Illinois' labor unions. Thank you for the dedication, skill and commitment you bring to your work, your families and your communities. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois is proud to support you and all that you do.





Apprentice Program: **IAM Automobile Mechanics' Union Local 701**

As experienced mechanics retire across the region, IAM Automobile Mechanics' Union Local 701 is preparing the next generation of skilled technicians. Its apprenticeship program offers hands-on training, industry certifications and an affordable path to a rewarding union career as an automotive or heavy truck/equipment technician.

Led by Training Director Jerry Eckert, the apprenticeship program combines classroom instruction with real-world experience. Apprentices go to class one day a week. The rest of the week is spent working in a Local 701 shop or dealership. This helps students build their skills while gaining valuable on-the-job experience.

The demand for new technicians continues to grow as experienced mechanics near retirement. The program currently serves 84 apprentices, about 95% of whom are male. Local 701 works with more than 500 union shops, creating strong career opportunities for graduates.

The value of hands-on training

One of the program's biggest advantages is affordability. To help attract and develop entry-level technicians,

the Mechanics' Local 701 Training Fund covers much of the cost. As a result, apprentices can attend for little cost and, in many cases, no cost at all. This makes the program less expensive than many community colleges and trade school, which adds to its appeal.

The training center currently employs four ASE Master Certified trainers. Students can choose from a 22-month diesel power and equipment program or a 27-month automotive technology program.

The first semester covers more than technical skills. Apprentices learn about personal finances, employee benefits, pensions, health care costs, professionalism, union membership and resume writing. Students are also encouraged to become active in the union and understand the importance of having a voice in their workplace. After the first semester, most students get hired in a shop where they can start working while completing the program.

Classes are intentionally kept small so students can get more one-on-one support. Each semester lasts 11 weeks, and the program operates year-round. To graduate, apprentices must complete extensive hands-on labs, classroom training, online coursework, ASE certifications and professionalism requirements. They must also meet on-the-job training requirements under a Local 701 collective bargaining agreement. The program's graduation rate exceeds 90%.

A program built for growth

Originally established in 2010, the training program recently moved from Carol Stream, IL, to a newly acquired 30,000-square-foot facility in Aurora, IL. About \$1.8 million in grant funding is being invested to upgrade the facility. Future plans include adding a chassis dynamometer, or dyno machine, for advanced vehicle diagnostic testing. Many of the vehicles and training tools used in the program have been donated.

People interested in the program apply online and pay a small application fee. The program currently accepts applications twice each year and typically receives between 50 and 125 applications per enrollment period. Applicants must be at least 18 years old and have a high school diploma or GED. They also complete a screening process and drug test. Most applicants are not working in the field when they apply.

A mentor for work and life

Eckert brings decades of industry experience to the program. The son of German immigrants, he grew up working on cars with his father, who supported the family by working as both a machinist and a cook. Eckert attended Lincoln Tech and began his career as a mechanic in 1993.

He joined the union in 2007. He spent more than eight years as an instructor and technical team leader at Universal Technical Institute. He then became an instructor for General Motors. He has been with Local 701 for the past three years.

Eckert describes himself as a workaholic. He is passionate about helping apprentices succeed. He believes technical training is only part of the job. He also teaches professionalism, a strong work ethic, money management and life skills that can help students succeed at work and at home. Outside of work, he enjoys drag racing and is an avid soccer fan.

A roadmap to future success

Eckert believes the program's success is about more than what students learn under the hood. For Local 701, the goal is to prepare apprentices not only for their first job, but for a long and fulfilling career as a union technician. Along with technical training, apprentices receive support and guidance that can help them build a rewarding career that supports their families for years to come.



Training director Jerry Eckert shares more than 30 years of knowledge and experience with future technicians every day.



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Contact Your Labor Team

David Gieselman
Vice President, Government
and Labor Division
312-653-7299
gieselmand@bcbsil.com

Dan MacKenzie
Director, Labor Accounts
312-653-7517
mackenzie@bcbsil.com

Jennie Tatooles
Sr. Manager Labor Accounts
312-653-2780
tatoolesj@bcbsil.com

Kevin Davis
Lead Account Executive
713-663-1290
kevin_davis@bcbsil.com

Reagan Dorrian
Account Executive
312-653-1557
reagan_dorrian@bcbsil.com

Parris Faulkner
Lead Account Executive
312-653-4399
parris_faulkner@bcbsil.com

Debbie Goich
Account Executive
312-653-4501
debbie_goich@bcbsil.com

Jake W. Hunt
Account Executive
312-653-1519
jason_hunt@bcbsil.com

Derek Serbe
Lead Account Executive
312-653-2212
serbed@bcbsil.com

Andy Seymour
Lead Account Executive
312-653-7199
seymoura@bcbsil.com

Christopher Tauscher
Account Executive
312-653-0374
christopher_tauscher@bcbsil.com

Allie White
Account Executive
312-653-0428
allie_white@bcbsil.com



Managing Sun Exposure on the Job

When the job calls for long days outdoors, sunshine is hard to avoid, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun is strongest. While sunshine has benefits, too much sun can increase your risk of health problems if you're not protected, even on cloudy days.

The benefits of sunlight

For union members who spend much of the day outdoors, working in the sun has its upsides. Sunlight is the body's main source of Vitamin D, which supports strong bones, a healthy immune system and good muscle function. Time in the sun also raises serotonin levels, which can help boost your mood. It also supports better sleep and overall wellbeing.

The importance of skin protection

Even with these benefits, too much sun can be harmful. Experts recommend five to 30 minutes of sun each day, based on your skin type and where you live. Many union members spend far more time than that outside as part of the job. UV rays can damage skin on cloudy days too, so daily protection is important.

Here are a few tips to help reduce your risk:

- Apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 50 or higher to all skin not covered by clothing, including your hands.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours, especially if you're sweating or working near water.

- Wear long-sleeve shirts and pants made from thick or tightly woven fabric in dark or bright colors, which protect better than light colors.
- Choose clothing with an ultraviolet protection factor of 50 or higher when possible.
- Wear wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses with UV protection.
- Take breaks in shaded areas when you can.

Skin checks and screenings

Regular inspections help keep worksites safe. The same goes for your health. The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends adults check their skin once a month for anything new, different or unusual. If you notice something that concerns you, make an appointment with a dermatologist.

A full skin exam is also recommended once a year. Finding problems early can make treatment easier and more effective. Talk with your doctor about screening options that are right for you.

Recommendations may vary. Talk with your health care provider about screening options and timing, especially if you have a higher risk.

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The Health Benefits of Sunshine (and How Much You Need Per Day). Cleveland Clinic. 2025.
Sun Protection. The Skin Cancer Foundation. 2025.
Working Outdoors & Skin Cancer. The Skin Cancer Foundation. 2026.
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