

The Aging Worker

*“Getting Age On Your Side”
or
Towards a safe and
aging worker friendly workplace*

Michelle Tew
Occupational Health Nurse

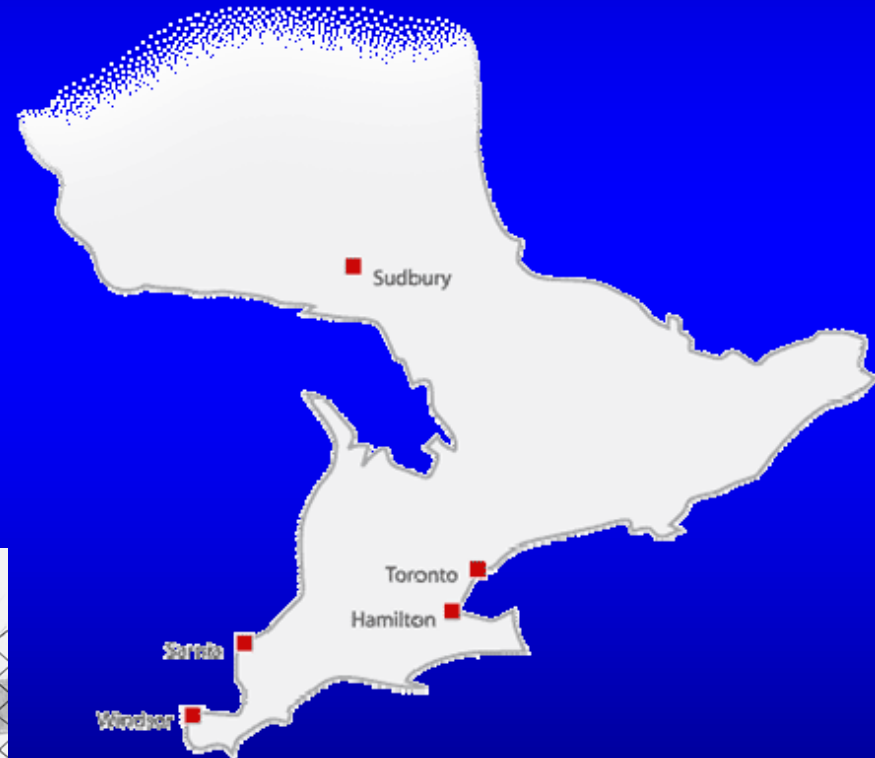


Outline

- Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW)
- What is an *aging* worker?
- How aging affects us
- What do we know about *aging* worker in the workplace
- Strategies: workplace, labour relations/
employer, worker



Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers



Windsor, Sarnia, Hamilton, Toronto, Sudbury





Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers

- inter-disciplinary health team:
 - occupational physicians
 - occupational health nurses
 - ergonomists
 - hygienists
- funded by WSIB Prevention Services
- Board of Directors has a majority of organized labour representatives



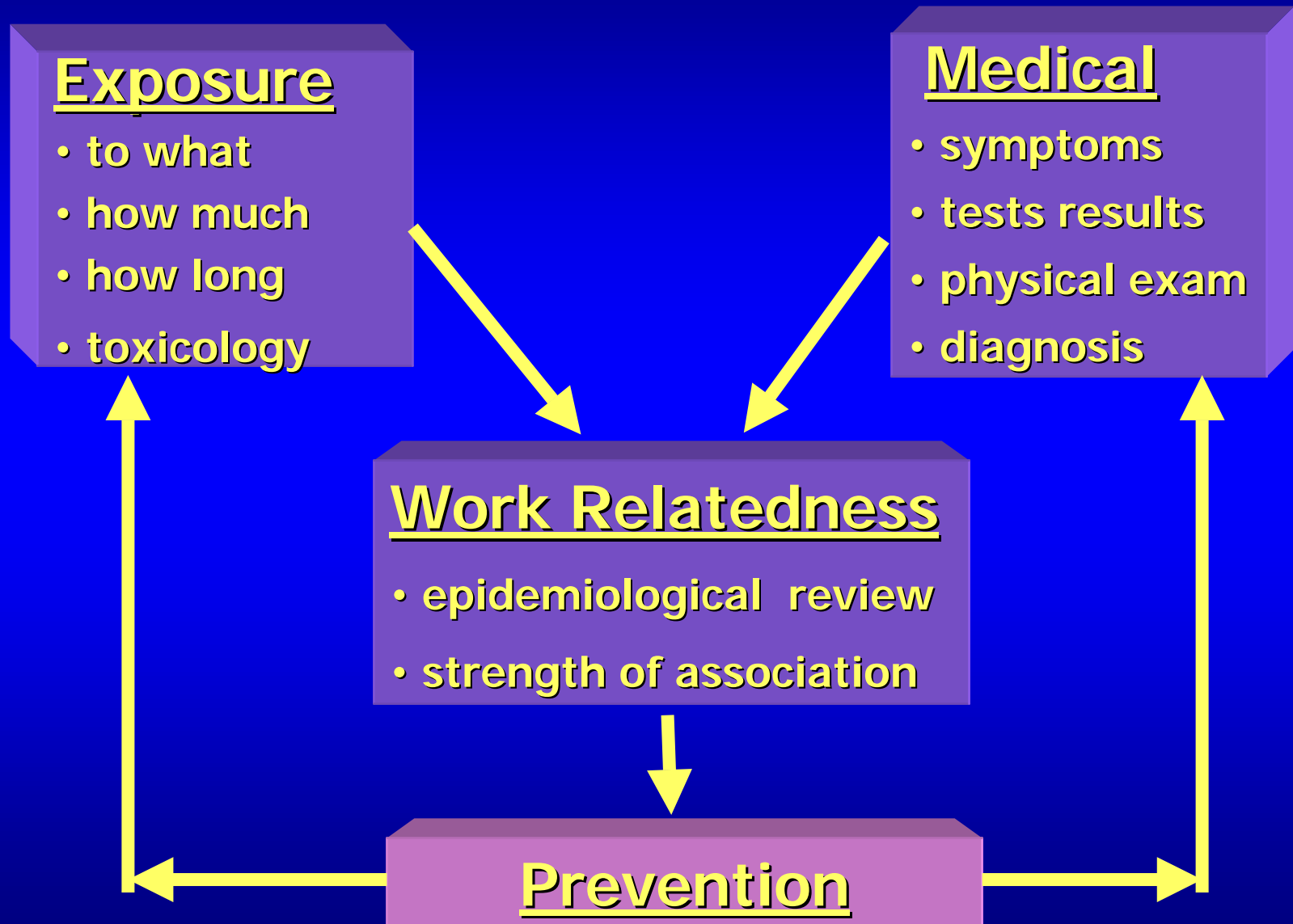


Clinic Services:

1. **individual client** (clinical)
2. answer **questions** (work/health related)
3. **educational presentations**
4. workplace **visits**
 - requested by co-chairs of JH&SC
5. exposure/health **investigations**
 - medical/hygiene/ergonomic combined



What OHCOW does:



**When do I become an
“Older/Aging Worker”**



When do I become an “Older/Aging Worker”

- When looking at recruitment practices, age limit viewed as *too old* ranged from **36-70**
- Some sources identify > 40 years (ADEA)
- Most commonly identified as > 45 years
- Some sources refer to 2 or 3 groups
 - Younger aging worker: 45-54
 - Middle aging worker: 55-65
 - Older aging worker: >65



Why are we concerned?



The Aging Population

Canada's population will undergo considerable aging in the 21st century:

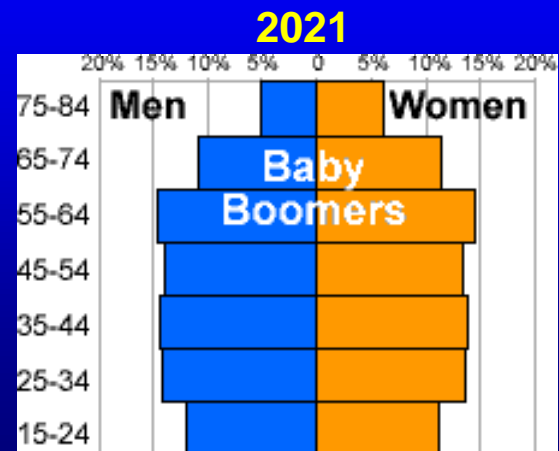
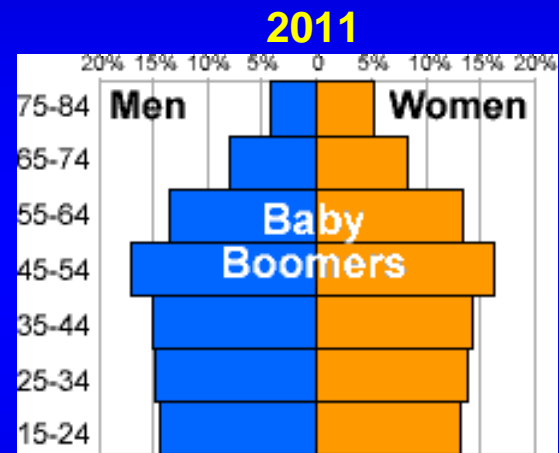
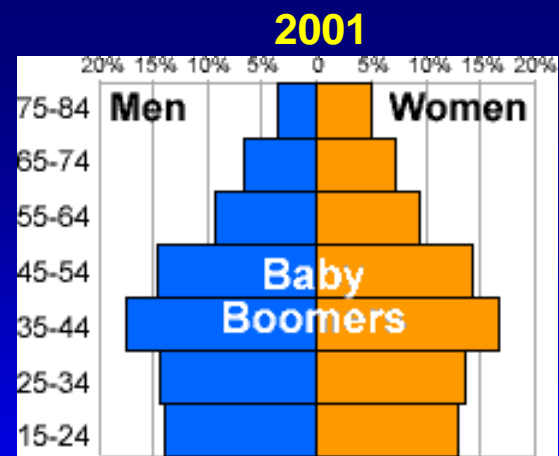
- Fertility rate below replacement rate
- Increased life expectancy due to improvements in public health

Estimated average annual growth of population from 2001 to 2021:

- All ages: 0.9%
- 15-44: 0.1%
- 45-64: 1.5%

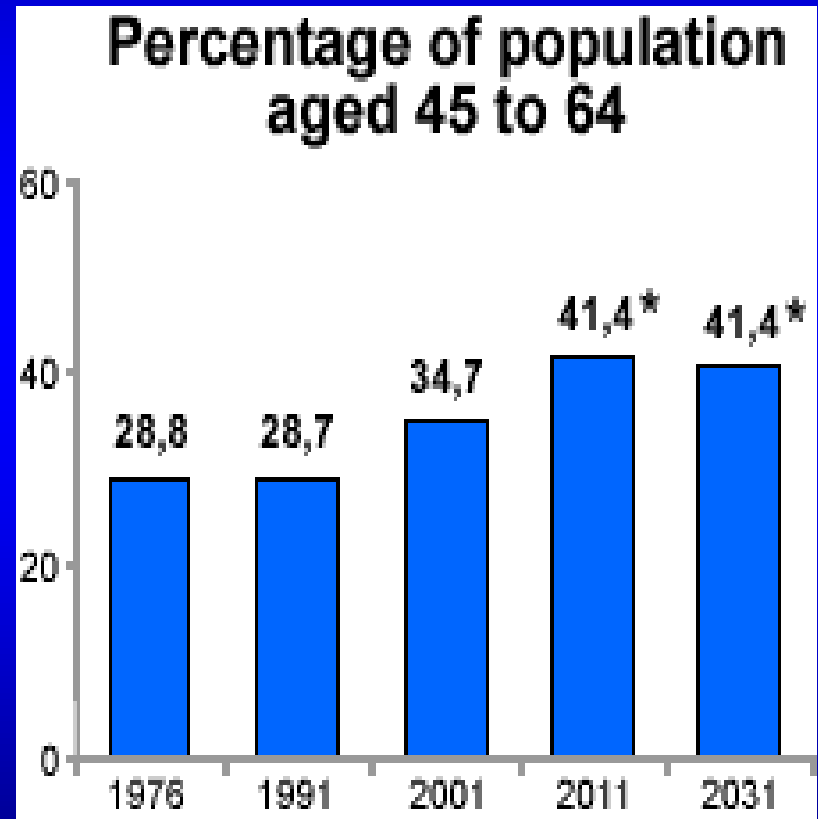
Growing percentage of population 65 and over:

- 12.7 % in 2001
- 14.4 % in 2011
- 17.9 % in 2021



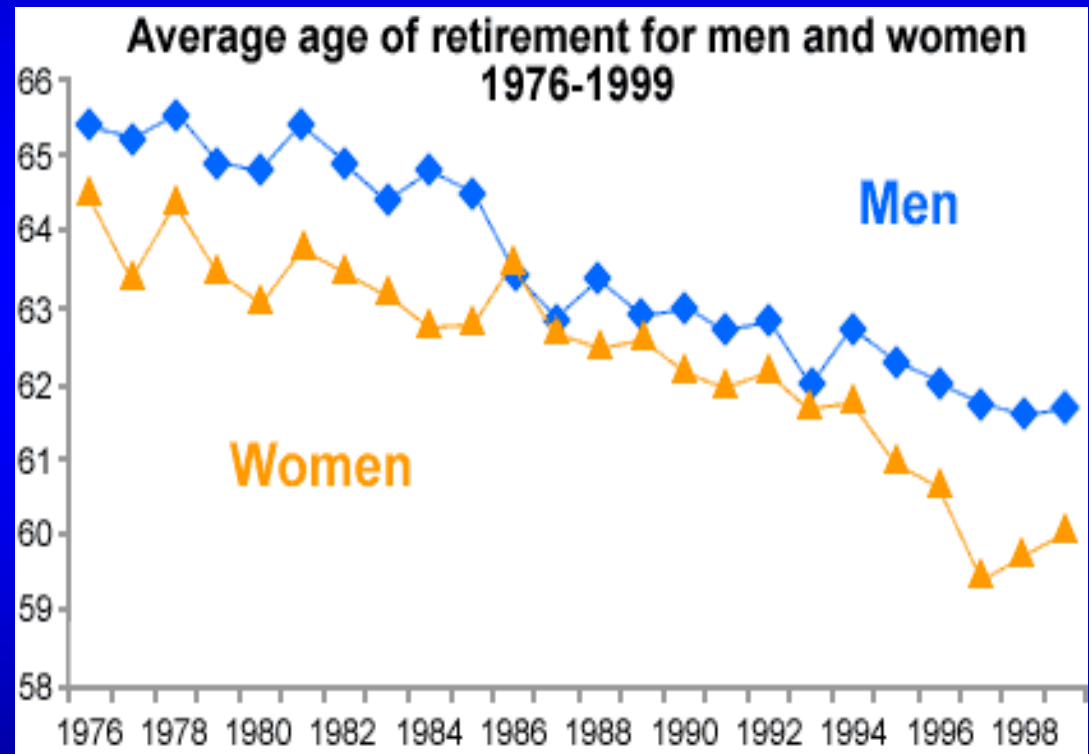
Shifting Composition of the Workforce in Canada

- Older workers will account for a larger share of the working-age population
- 46% of baby boomers, people born between 1946 and 1966, are close to their retirement or pre-retirement years
- by 2011, approximately 41% of the working population will be between the ages of 45 and 64, compared to 29% in 1991



Implications for the workforce: *Early retirement more common*

- Average age of retirement was 61.0 years (1999)
- 2/3 retire before the full CPP/QPP age of 65
- 43% of people retired before 60 in late 90s compared to 29% in late 70s.
- Early retirement is more common in public sector:
 - 58.5 yrs, public sector
 - 61.3 yrs, private sector
 - 65.0 yrs, self-employed



Gender shifts in workforce

- More women in older workforce
 - Since 1975 the % of women in labour force aged 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 increased by 11.8 and 10.4 percentage points, respectively to 46% and 41%
 - In the last 25 years, the participation rate of women aged 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 increased by 28.1 and 9.9 percentage points, respectively while rate for men aged 45 to 54 and 55 to 64 decreased by 3.2 and 14.6 percentage points



Implications for the workforce:

- Many people continue to work beyond age 65
 - 11.8% of population aged 65 to 69 were active in the labour force in 2001- 34.3% were women (% of women likely to grow) HRDC.gov.ca
- **Reasons vary:**
 - enjoy work
 - financial need: lack of/insufficient pension, health care and living costs
 - lack of confidence in finances /pensions/services;
 - increasing longevity and function
 - legislation to protect aging worker
 - declining pool of younger workers – they are asked by employers to continue to work



Implications for Employers

- Labour Shortage
 - Loss of workers through retirement
 - Fewer available younger workers
 - Retention of skilled workers critical issue
- Skills Shortage
 - Already a problem – will get worse



Implications for Employers and Aging Workers

1. Employment/Work Model

- ? Legislation to eliminate retirement age
- Older workers want to work on their terms
- Attracting and maintaining skills of older workers will be essential
- Determination of time to leave ... are there guidelines – will likely be based on function

2. Benefits – medical and other

- ????

See Ministry of Labour discussion document

<http://www.gov.on.ca/LAB/english/news/2004/04-92b1.html>



How Aging Affects Us

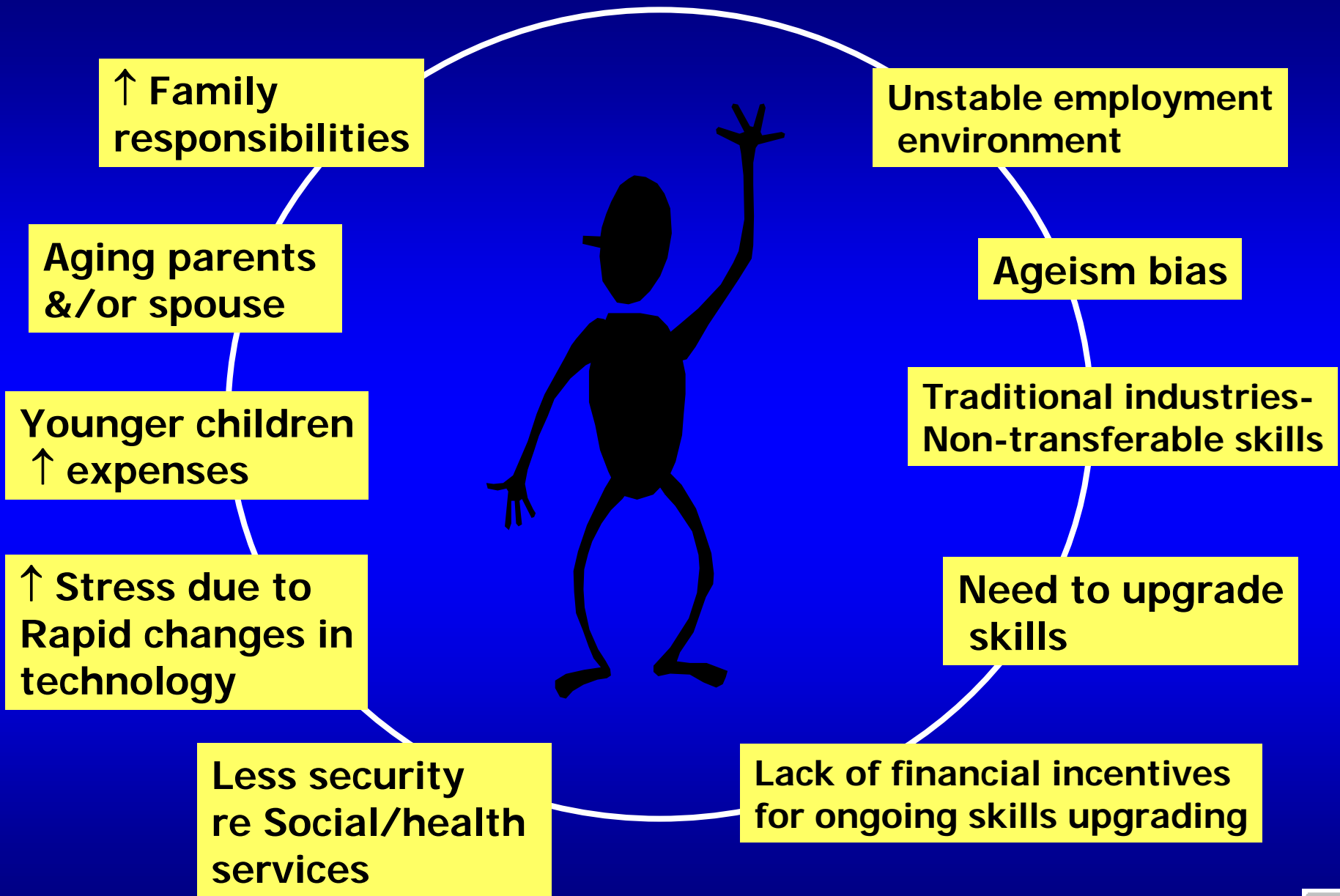


**Any age related changes
vary greatly with the
individual - there is
consistently more variation
within age groups than
between them!**

**You cannot generalize
function based on age**



External factors affecting how we function as we age



Internal factors affecting how we function as we age

↓ Physical capabilities
& energy levels

Decreased resilience
To chronic wear and
tear

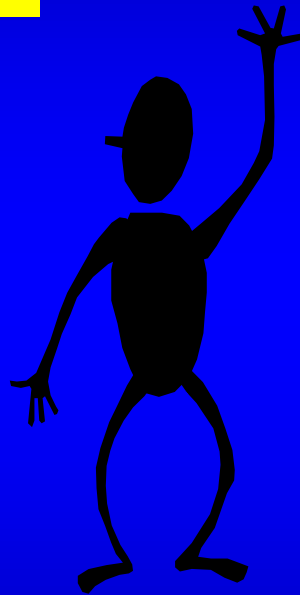
Decline in some
mental functions
-others stay the
same

Health Status
-personal health
problems

Hearing loss
↓ Visual acuity

Fitness Level

Sleep changes



Health

- Number of health conditions (chronic) increases with age
- Most common chronic health conditions:
 - Cardiovascular disease
 - Cancer
 - Arthritis
 - Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease
 - Diabetes
 - Neurological
 - Mental health



About growing older

Motor Function

- Changes are gradual and moderate
 - Declines are greater for leisure activity than for on the job performance
- Decline in physical strength due to deterioration in muscle mass - decline in endurance is less
 - On avg, a persons' strength at 51-55 is about 80% of what their strength was in early 30s



About growing older

Motor Function

- ↓ resilience to chronic wear and tear - ↑ risk for RSI
 - Joint mobility decreases slightly from 20-60
- Incidence of arthritis ↑ dramatically > 45 yrs
- Slower reaction time
 - Average reaction time of older groups (66-87) was 30% slower than that of younger groups
- Older workers have more experience – compensates for slowing



About growing older

Cardio respiratory function

- Decline in cardiac output → ↓ in maximal physical capacity of older workers
- Reduced capacity for extended periods of physical labour and ↑ breathlessness with physical activity
- Changes do not normally affect work performance

Some processes function adequately in older individuals under resting condition; *the age-related deficit is brought out when system is stressed.* (Kohn 1985 p 15)



About growing older – *Mental function*

- Myth of intellectual decline with age no longer accepted
 - Greater variability as get older; decline of mental speed greater than mental power; abilities deteriorate at different rates
 - Changes in intellectual functioning are typically minimal for healthy workers who receive high levels of education, training and are exposed to appropriate stimulation
- Ability to perform high speed tasks declines
- Self-rated health status has a significant impact on cognitive performance



About growing older – *Learning & memory*

- Short term memory, reasoning & processing speed start to decline > 20 BUT long term memory, quantitative knowledge, depth & breadth of knowledge continue to increase
- Ability to learn new tasks remains – dependent on comfort level, motivation, attention, health status & context
- OWs may require more time & effort to “encode” information but future retrieval same as for younger person



What do we know about aging worker in the workplace



About growing older in the workplace

- Older workers are essentially “survivors”
- No difference in job performance based on age
- Rate of accidents is lower in OWs but the severity of accidents is greater
- No logical age-absence pattern



Reports re workplace health

Men & Women 50-64 vs. 30-39

(Crompton 96 – NPHS 1994)

- No differences between older workers and younger workers in
 - memory, problem solving, dexterity, mobility
- Older workers live with more aches and pains
- More likely to have chronic ailments but prevalence of conditions is low (1:5)



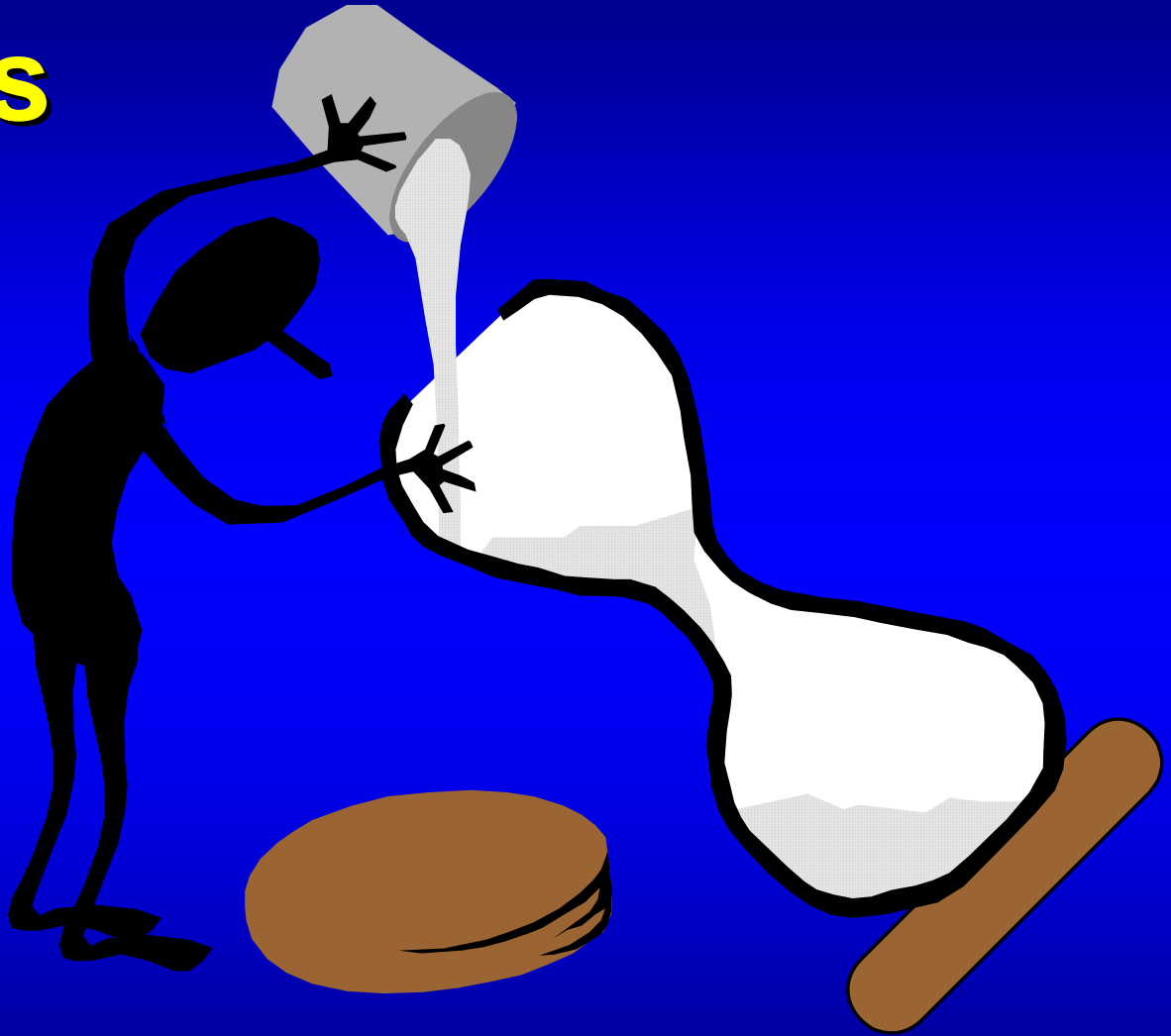
Aging Worker and Shift work

- ↑ difficulty getting to sleep and generally shorter nocturnal sleep → increased “morningness” (waking early)
- Generally thought there is decreasing tolerance of shift work with age – poorly understood. Older worker's circadian rhythms are more disturbed when rotating shifts and they had lower performance
- No differences in those accustomed to working nights – survivors
- Older travelers have more severe jet lag symptoms than younger travelers



Strategies

- Workplace
- Labour relations
- Worker



Strategies for the Workplaces/ Employers



“Aging Worker” Friendly Workplace

Positive attitude
Towards aging

Flexible work
schedules

Training for
Older workers

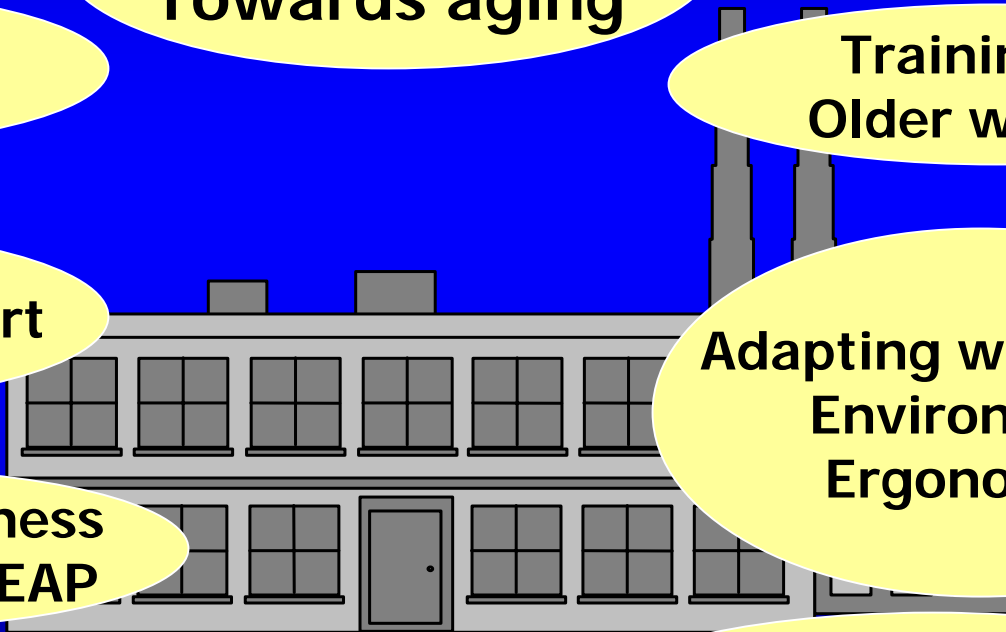
Family care support

Adapting workplaces
Environment
Ergonomics

Health & Wellness
Programs e.g EAP

Job redesign

Reorganization of work



Develop a positive attitude towards aging

- Ensure no age discrimination in Human Resources
 - active recruitment of OWs
- Actively address perceptions/attitudes
- Do not make assumptions – if in doubt, ask about abilities (to do tasks)
- Provide accommodations where feasible

Create supportive workplace culture promoting respect towards all employees, regardless of age, race, gender.



Develop a positive attitude towards aging:

Age Management *Ilmarinen and Rantanen (1999)*

- Knowledgeable management (foreman, supervisors, managers) of ageing workforce includes
 - Positive attitude towards one's own ageing as well as the ageing of others
 - Support of team and group working forums including own participation
 - Finding individual solutions which fit with the changing strengths and weaknesses during ageing
 - Open-minded communication regarding the coming changes in working organizations



Improving “work ability”

- Found that a decrease in repetitive movements, increased satisfaction with supervisors attitudes and increase in vigorous physical exercise in leisure time were significant predictors of improved work ability (51-62) (Ilmarinen1999)
- “Efforts to enhance the autonomy and decision latitude of older workers might well result in heightened levels of psychological well-being and performance” Robertson 1998, p. 88



Training of Older Workers (OW)

- Offers challenge & opportunity
 - Broader range of employees work experience
 - Stimulate interest & creativity
- Design appropriate training programs to help OWs learn
- Use OW as trainers/mentors
 - Good utilization of resources
- Consider creative approaches
 - E.g. younger workers “reverse mentoring” older workers regarding technologies



Appropriate training programs for AW include

- Relate new skills to past experience
- Allow for self paced learning - lots of time to practice
- Provide supportive environment + + - small groups
- Provide “Hands on” experience – with someone who knows the process

Learning is not dependent on age but is dependent on the organization of occurrence for learning



Flexible Work Schedules

- Flexible hours (reduced, compressed, extended work weeks)
- Job sharing
- Part time
- Self-funded leaves
- Gradual reduction of hours – phased in retirement



Adapting Workplaces & Work

- Environment e.g. lighting, heat
 - ↑ Intensity of lighting, indirect lighting better to reduce glare
 - Stable heat - ↑ sensitivity to cold
 - visual cues to compensate for ↓ hearing
 - Noise reduction
- Working at home
- Ergonomics & Job design
- Reorganization of work



Ergonomic Solutions (Mcmahan)

- Reduce risk factors for RSI – repetition, force, awkward posture
- Reduce extreme joint movement
 - Keep repetitive motions within normal ROM for the joint
 - Alter tool or handle to reduce wrist deviations
 - Design controls so they do not need to be pinched or grasped tightly e.g. replace knobs with levers or push buttons (easier to grasp)
 - Use distinctive textures and shapes when tactile identification is required
 - Minimize working conditions that require unusual posture such as twisting, reaching above head and leaning to one side



Ergonomic Solutions

- Reduce excessive force
 - Modify job tasks that require prolonged and excessive muscle contractions
 - Keep cutting edges sharp
 - Use jigs and clamps instead of hands to grip
 - Mechanical assists vs muscle
 - Padding to reduce harmful pressures
 - Locate operations within comfortable ROM



Ergonomic Solutions

- Reduce highly repetitive tasks
 - Mechanize special tools with power drivers
 - Automate processes
 - Provide workers with larger and more varied number of tasks to perform



Work organization / job design

- Promoting (mandatory) breaks or develop *work-rest* schedules
 - need for recovery increases with age and is dependent on heaviness of work
 - recovery phases should be incorporated into daily work
 - more micro-pauses during shift needed & pauses should immediately follow peak loads in work to prevent cumulative fatigue
- Setting weight limits and lifting guidelines
 - Match with physical abilities (esp for females)



Work organization / job design

- Reduce jobs requiring exertion of high muscular forces such as lifting, lowering, carrying of moderate to heavy loads, pushing, pulling of heavy carts on broken or inclined floors
- Plan work so that physical performance of tasks requiring higher energy are performed earlier in the shift
- **Involve worker in task planning** - they know the job and their abilities best



Altering Work Arrangements

- Family care support
- Spouse care, elder care, child care
- Health and wellness initiatives
 - Employee assistance programs/ occ health services
 - Fitness facilities/ activities e.g. tai chi
 - Regular physical exercise preventing decline of physical capacities, good mental health
 - Offering Audiometric screening for workers > 50



Strategies for Labour Relations/ Employer



Strategies for labour relations

- Study on collective bargaining and older worker by HRDC– published Mar 2002*
 - The purpose was to examine to what degree older workers and ageing in the workforce have been considered in the context of collective bargaining.
 - Covered 6 areas :
 - work-time organization
 - leaves of absence
 - training, retraining and education
 - economic security
 - (anti-)discrimination clauses and practices
 - transition to retirement



Strategies for labour relations ...

Work-time

organization

- Shift work
- Flexibility re hrs
- Overtime
- Voluntary work reduction

Leaves of absence

- Vacation
- Sick leave
- Special LOA



Example: shift work

Maritime Employers Association and Longshoremen's Union, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 375 (1998-2003): "Employees who have accumulated thirty **(30) years of service** or who have reached sixty (60) years of age may, at their request, **be exempted from the night shift**. A maximum of thirty (30) employees may claim this exemption, based on seniority." [translation]



Example: Family care leave

Air Canada and National Automobile, Aerospace, Transportation and General Workers Union of Canada (CAW-Canada), Local 2213 (1999-2002):
"Employees will be allowed a maximum of **three (3) days** in each calendar year **for the care of their sick or injured spouse, parents or dependent child**. For pay purposes, accrued sick leave credits shall be reduced when an employee is absent up to a maximum of three (3) days per year."



Strategies for labour relations ...

Training, retraining and education

- Types of retraining
- Training provisions
- Educational leave
- Funding scheme

Economic security

- seniority rights
- Job security
- Income related provisions



Example: training

Mentoring programs

Ontario Hospital Association and Ontario Nurses' Association (1998-2001): "Nurses may, from time to time, be assigned a **formal mentorship role for a designated nurse**. (...) The Hospital will pay the nurse for this assigned additional responsibility a **premium of sixty (60¢) cents per hour**, in addition to her or his regular salary and applicable premium allowance."



Strategies for labour relations ...

(Anti-)discrimination clauses and practices

- Re age or age alone
- Affirmative action
- Age based
discriminatory
elements in related
clauses

Transition to retirement

- Pre-retirement leaves
- Supports to assist
OWs to prepare for
retirement
- Phased retirement



Example: pre-retirement

IPL Inc. and Union des employés et employées de service, Local 800 (2001-2004): "*The Employer shall grant a reduction in the employee's work week with respect to a position that he holds for the purpose of phased retirement*, on condition that he: (a) is a regular employee; (b) has accrued ten (10) years' seniority; (c) is at least sixty (60) years old; (d) applies in writing at least ninety (90) days before the phased retirement is to take effect, indicating the desired reduction of hours, the desired schedule and the effective date. An employee may cancel his phased retirement at any time but must advise the Employer at least thirty (30) days in advance. An employee who takes a phased retirement ***continues to accrue seniority*** based on his status before the phased retirement took effect. During the phased retirement, the employee is ***entitled to all the benefits*** under the collective agreement pro-rated according to his hours of work." [translation]



Strategies for the Worker



Strategies for the individual

- Maintain Physical fitness e.g. exercise program, walking, active lifestyle
- Stretching and strength training
- Participate in education and training
- Be realistic about abilities Take advantage of programs and services available (eg occ health, EAP, physical fitness)
- Pay attention to work-life balance



In summary

- **Creating an aging worker friendly workplace begins with our attitudes towards our own aging and involves everyone.**
- **Making improvements in the workplace for aging workers benefits everyone.**
- **The earlier good designs to workplace equipment and jobs are implemented, the sooner *everyone* is at a lower risk of injury.**

Start thinking of changes in the workplace which will benefit everyone



Any questions?

mtew@ohcow.on.ca

