

AGING WORKFORCE CHECKLIST

VISION

Older workers may have more problems focusing on small text or fine detail, adapting to darkness, seeing in areas without good lighting, distinguishing between close color variations, and dealing with glare.

- Screen for vision.** Early detection can correct vision and prevent existing problems from getting worse.
- Provide adequate levels of light.** Adjustable but consistent lighting throughout the workplace will help improve vision for older workers.
- Provide magnification tools.** Most computers are now equipped with magnification tools to make screen text more readable.
- Consider text size of signs, controls and displays.** Older workers can read larger type and visual displays more easily.
- Use color contrast.** Use of color can help older workers identify potential hazards.
- Reduce clutter.** Clutter can cause visual distraction for older workers, making it more difficult to identify and process information.

HEARING

Between 25 percent and 40 percent of adults older than 65, and 40 percent to 66 percent of adults older than 75, have some degree of hearing loss.

- Screen for hearing loss and require the use of hearing aids.** Undetected hearing loss can cause older workers to struggle to hear and understand important information.
- Minimize exposure to loud noise.** Educate employees on the effects of noise and on the importance of wearing hearing protection.
- Minimize background noise.** Reducing background noise can significantly improve both hearing and comprehension in older workers.

COGNITIVE ABILITY

Older workers may sacrifice speed for accuracy in decision making.

- Minimize tasks requiring quick decisions.** Older workers process information more slowly than younger workers.
- Reduce distractions and simultaneous demands.** Older workers perform better to single stimulus and response scenarios than they do to tasks requiring quick analysis of information from multiple sources.
- Allow sufficient time.** Older workers require more time than their younger counterparts to analyze information to form decisions.

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MOVEMENT CONTROL

Reaction time for older adults is slower than for younger adults, and the difference becomes greater the more complex the analysis and response task is.

- Minimize tasks requiring quick reactions.** Reaction time among older workers is slower.
- Simplify stimulus and response.** Older workers perform better to single stimulus and response scenarios than they do to tasks requiring quick reaction.
- Allow additional time to perform tasks.** Older workers have a slower reaction time and often lose strength with age.
- Consider good ergonomic design.** Consider the limitations of the older worker. Limit the number and weight of lifts, provide mechanical lifting and material handling, and provide mechanical assists.
- Suggest physical activity.** Walking and strength building can improve range of motion and the ability to control balance.

MENTAL HEALTH/STRESS

Older adults face a number of risk factors—including illness, disability, medications, hypochondria, grief, fear of death and institutionalization—that can lead to depression.

- Screen for physical problems.** Screening and disease management can help older workers understand how to better deal with these stressful conditions and provide a better sense of self-control.
- Modify the workplace.** A willingness to modify the workplace for the older worker can help reassure older workers that they are valued.
- Train managers.** Training can help managers identify the symptoms of depression among older workers.

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FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY EVALUATION

Use the process of functional capacity evaluation to determine if employees of any age have the physical and cognitive abilities to handle a particular job.

- Step 1.** Create a detailed listing of physical and cognitive job requirements. Examples of the information covered in a job requirements listing include:
- Physical demands (lifting, walking, standing, climbing)
 - Work pace (production requirements and the ability of workers to vary pace)
 - Environmental factors (inside or outdoors, temperature, illumination, noise levels)
 - Sensory requirements (vision, hearing, smell)
 - Cognitive requirements (the need to analyze data and react quickly, memory requirements)

Notes:

- Step 2.** Perform a function evaluation of the prospective worker to determine capacity to do the job. This often includes:
- Medical history
 - Physical examination
 - Specific testing (vision, hearing, aerobic capacity, strength, balance)
 - Evaluations of experience, coping or compensating skills or mechanisms
 - Comparison of job requirements to the worker's physical and cognitive capacities
 - Recommendations on fitness for the job and details of any mismatches

Notes:

- Step 3.** Analyze the results to determine if the worker is fit for the job, or if job modifications and/or training may allow the employee to safely handle the job.

Notes:

- Step 4.** Reevaluate functional capacity whenever an employee experiences additional health problems, or begins to have reduction in quality or quantity of work for unexplained reasons.

Notes:

To access additional resources, visit the Risk Management Resource Center on www.eains.com, or contact your Regional office to speak with your Risk Management Consultant 1.855.533.3444.