HAND TOOL DESIGN
DEA 3250/6510
Professor Alan Hedge

Ergonomic Tools?
- It says that they are ergonomic, but are they and why?

Hand Tool Design Issues
- Hand tools are ubiquitous and integral to technological progress.
- Poor hand tool design results in:
  - Lost productivity (slower work, more errors)
  - More injuries (increased WRMSD risk)
  - More illness (increased long term illness e.g. vibration syndrome)
  - More accidents (9% of all disabling injuries related to poor hand tool design)
  - More costs (worker’s compensation, litigation)

Biomechanical Considerations
- Hand grip strength depends on forearm muscles.
- Grip configuration determines strength requirements.
- Wrist posture affects strength and injury risks - straight wrist operation is always preferred.

Wrist Flexor Strain and Hand Posture

Wrist Deviation and Grip Strength

Tool Design: Shape
- Tool shape directly impacts hand tool performance.
- Tool should be shaped to avoid wrist deviation, allowing the hand and forearm to remain in alignment during forceful grip exertion.
- Typical design solutions involve:
  - Bent/curved handle designs
  - Pistol grip
  - Cylindrical grip

Ergonomic Design: Handles
- Handles can help to improve grip possibilities.
- Handles should be designed for bare or gloved hand operation.
- Handles should be located at or above the center of gravity of the load.
- Handles should be textured to reduce slippage, but should NOT be contoured.
- Handles should not be cold or hot, or sharp.
- Loads > 10lbs (~5 Kg) should have a handle.
• Bulky objects should have 2 handles.

**Tissue Compression**
• Poor handle design causes compression of nerves and blood vessels in the hand.

**Ergonomic Design: Tool Shape**
• Reshaping the tool can improve the functionality of the handle, as shown in this redesign soldering iron.

**Ergonomic Design: Paint Scraper**
• Conventional paint scraper handle design compresses the ulnar artery.
• Modified handle rests between thumb and index finger preventing pressure on sensitive regions of the hand (Tichauer, 1967).

**Hand Tools: Grip Design**
• Grips should be contoured to the curve of the palm of the hand.
• Grips should not be ridged.
• Grip span should comfortably fit the palm of the hand (4”-5”).
• Grip handle length should fit the hand.
• Grips should be suitably padded.

**Curved Handle Tool Design**

**Bent Pliers** (Tichauer, 1978)
• Many wiring operation require gripping regular pliers with deviated wrist posture.

**Bent Pliers**
• 80 new employees studied for 12 weeks in 2 groups.
• <10% of those with bent handle pliers developed problems compared with > 60% of those with straight-handle pliers (Tichauer, 1978)

**Bent Handle Scissors**
• Bent handle scissor designs put the wrist in a better posture than conventional designs.

**Hand Tools: Scissors Design**

**Poultry Knife Design** (Armstrong, 1982)
• Cumulative trauma injury rate more than twice as high among poultry cutters as other workers.
• Ergonomic analysis revealed:
  – Frequent use of deviated wrist postures
  – Sustained grip force even when not cutting
  – Accidental hand/finger cuts
  – Wet, cold hands

**Poultry Knife Design** (Armstrong, 1982)
• Bent handle for straight wrist
• Strap to allow hand relaxation
Curved blade for straight hand cutting.

**Ergonomic Knives**
- Bent handles for straight wrist cutting.
- Choice of angles for different cut strokes.

**Ergonomic Knives**
- Some knife designs use a sawing action and a straight wrist can be maintained when the handle curves upwards.

**Ergonomic Knives etc.**
- Ergonomic design principles can be used for a variety of hand tools.

**Ergonomic Design: Hammers**

**Ergonomic Design: Canoe/Kayak Paddles**
- The bent-handle paddle design allows for:
  - Better wrist and upper body posture during paddle use.
  - More stroke power.
  - More comfortable paddle use.
  - Less fatigue.

**Ergonomic Design: Grip span**
- Grip spans that are too small or large reduce grip strength and stability.
- Grip span depends upon gender and anthropometric dimensions.
- 2.5”-3.5” is optimal.

**Ergonomic Design: Ice Cream Scoop**
- Poor design:
  - Wide grip span
  - Short neck
  - Short handle

**Ergonomic Design: Pneumatic Tools**
- Thumb switch controls can cause overextension of the thumb.
- Finger-strip controls share the load between the fingers, and allow the thumb to be used in a power grip for tool stability.
- Tool diameter must fit the hand.

**Ergonomic Design: Power Tools**
- Tool design should facilitate the effective use of a power grip.
- Tool weight should not place the center of gravity too far away from the handle.
- Longer handles (>4”) are better.

**Ergonomic Design:**
**Posture and Adjustable handles**
- Workers should avoid bent wrist postures where possible.
• Some tools have adjustable grips to allow a worker to maintain good wrist posture.

**Ergonomic Design: Pens/Pencils**
• Many different pen/pencil designs, but the principles of optimal grip span and wrist posture still apply.
• Pens/pencils should:
  – Not be too thin or too thick
  – Have a padded, shaped grip
  – Not be too heavy
  – Be well balanced
  – Have easy flow nib/point

**Ergonomic Instruments**
• Musical instruments can be ergonomically designed.

**Ergonomic Design: Handedness**
• Depending on the definition of handedness, 10-30% of people are left-handed.
• On average, left handed people live 9 years less and are 5 times more likely to die of accident-related injuries than right handed people.
• Many products are designed for right handed people, but an increasing number of left hand designs are becoming available.

**Ergonomic Design: Different abilities**
• Hand tool use can become more difficult with many ageing disorders, such as arthritis.
• Numerous “add-ons” are available to help people with restricted dexterity to perform commonplace manual tasks.

**Vibrating Hand Tools**
• Many types of hand tools vibrate.
• Vibrations can be:
  – Intentional – integral to the function of the tool
  – Incidental – a by product of tool operation
• Prolonged use of vibrating tool can cause vascular damage to the upper limbs.

**Examples: Vibrating Hand Tools**

**Vibration Effects**
• Vibrations are mechanical oscillations of the body or body segment
• 5 quantities are important:
  – Point of application (e.g. hand, arm, feet, buttocks)
  – Frequency (Hz)
  – Acceleration (m/s^2) – usual measure of vibration load
  – Duration
  – Individual frequency and resonance

**Resonant Frequencies**
• Everything has its own natural frequency. The closer a vibration is to this the greater its amplitude. For the human body:
  – 3-4 Hz: strong resonance in cervical vertebrae
  – 4 Hz: peak resonance for lumbar vertebrae
  – 5 Hz: shoulder girdle (very strong resonance up to double normal amplitude)
  – 20-30 Hz: resonance between head and shoulders
  – 60-90 Hz: eyeballs
  – 100-200 Hz: lower jaw

**Direction of vibration**
• Vertical (up/down)
• Horizontal (forwards/backwards)
• Lateral (side-to-side)

**Vertical Vibrations**
• Vibrations between 2.5-5Hz induce strong resonance in neck and lumbar vertebrae
• Vibrations between 4-6Hz induce strong resonance in trunk, shoulders and neck
• Vibrations between 20-30Hz induce strong resonance in head and shoulders

**Vibrating Hand Tools**

**Vibration Effects**
• Physiological effects – vibration initiates protective muscle reflexes (extended muscles shorten), which increases heart and respiration rate, and energy consumption
• Visual effects – visual acuity decreases and images are blurred and unsteady
• Skill – less able to perform skilled movements
• Information processing – less able to process information
• Speech – difficult to talk
• Driving – at 2-16Hz driving performance is impaired and errors increase

**Vibration as a Nuisance**
• 4-8 Hz – greatest subjective sensitivity
• 10 m/s² (1g) – ‘very severe intensity’
• 15 m/s² (1.5g) – dangerous and intolerable

**Vibration Health Effects**
• 0.2-0.7 Hz – motion sickness, nausea vomiting (max at 0.3 Hz)
• 1-4 Hz – interference with breathing
• 4-10 Hz – pains in chest, abdomen, rattling of jaws, muscular discomfort
• 8-12 Hz – backache
10-20 Hz – muscle tension, headaches, eyestrain, pains in throat, intestines, bladder, speech disturbances

<40 Hz (e.g. pneumatic hammer) causes degenerative damage to bones, joints, and hand/arm tendons

40-300 Hz (e.g. power tools) – damage blood vessels and nerves in hands.

**Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)**

Vibration-induced white finger (VWF) is the most common condition among the operators of hand-held vibrating tools. Vibration can cause changes in tendons, muscles, bones and joints, and can affect the nervous system. Collectively, these effects are known as Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS). The symptoms of VWF are aggravated when the hands are exposed to cold.

- Attacks of whitening (blanching) of one or more fingers when exposed to cold
- Tingling and loss of sensation in the fingers
- Loss of light touch
- Pain and cold sensations between periodic white finger attacks
- Loss of grip strength
- Bone cysts in fingers and wrists

**Vibration White Finger**

- **Stage 0** – No symptoms
  - OT - Intermittent tingling
  - ON - Intermittent numbness
  - OTN - Tingling and numbness

- **Stage 1** - Blanching of one or more fingertips with or without tingling and numbness.

- **Stage 2** - Blanching of one or more fingers with numbness, usually during winter only. Slight interference with home and social activities; no interference with work.

- **Stage 3** - Extensive blanching with frequent episodes during both summer and winter. Definite interference with work, home and social activities; restricted hobbies.

- **Stage 4** - Extensive blanching of most fingers; frequent episodes during summer and winter; finger ulceration, gangrene. Occupation change required to avoid further vibration exposure.

**VWF Prevalence**

- 50 percent of 146 tree fellers examined in British Columbia had Raynaud's phenomenon; it affected 75 percent of workers with over 20 years of experience.

- 45 percent of 58 rock drillers had attacks of white finger; 25 percent of workers with less than five years of experience, but 80 percent of those with over 16 years experience were affected.

**VWF Latency**

**Vibration Limits**

- <2Hz – accelerations of 3-4 g are intolerable
- 4-14 Hz – accelerations of 1.2-3.2 g are intolerable
- >14 Hz – accelerations of 5-9 g are intolerable

- ISO has established vibration limits based on:
  - Criterion of comfort (divide acceleration by 3.15)
  - Criterion of maintenance of efficiency
  - Criterion of safety (multiply acceleration by 3.15)

**ISO 2631 Vibration Limits**
- 0.3-0.45 m/s² for 8 hrs day for tractors, heavy vehicles, construction machinery (mostly 2-5 Hz vibrations)
- Dampen hand-tool vibrations

**Reducing Vibration Injuries**

- Anti-vibration gloves – absorb vibration energy, can get some impairment of dexterity.
- Tool re-design – e.g. ‘Gentle Jack’ jackhammer:
  - 50% fewer parts than a conventional jackhammer
  - 50% less noise
  - 99% less vibration