Ergonomic hazards - some myths & realities

Women need *"special treatment"*

People in the same jobs will do their jobs differently. After all, individuals are not the same anthropometrically; our body parts are often different lengths and widths and proportionally not exactly the same as other people.

Here are some things to consider:

- jobs in which women work are usually more repetitive, monotonous and stressful than men's
- caring, nurturing and supportive roles are key parts of women's work, while men still tend to do "heavy" manual, technical and managerial tasks
- men are more often exposed to chemicals, forceful exertions, and vibration

- tool design, working surface height, and equipment dimensions can make very different demands on the body, depending on workers' dimensions (anthropometry)
- using "average" sizes or dimensions can make a big deal out of physical differences between men and women when it's less of an issue in real life. Differences are important, but so is the amount of overlap (e.g., how well hands fit, or don't fit tools; amounts that can be lifted in what circumstances).

In a study at Canadian army bases:

- average wrist to index finger length for women was 170 mm (6.7 inches) and for men - 183 mm (7.2 inches) or 7.6% higher
- 92% of the women's hands were shorter than that of the average man
- about 92% of the men's hands are longer than that of the average woman;
- 36% of the women's and 46% of the men's hands were between 170 mm & 183 mm long
- **when height and size are factored in, apparent gender differences in workplace health problems may disappear**

<u>The bottom line</u>: avoid stereotypes, but be aware that differences exist. Yes, ergonomics is about adapting workplaces, tools and equipment to individual's needs, but finding problems also requires looking for patterns and investigating individual situations.