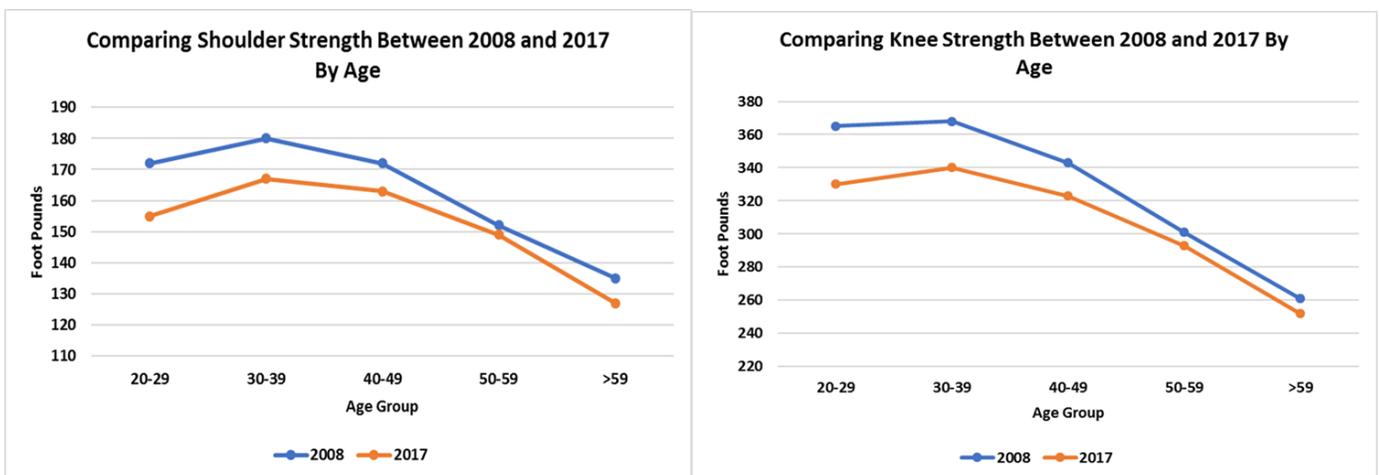


Good News: The Number of Low Back Claims Have Decreased

Bad News: Shoulder and Knee Claims Have Increased

In December 2017, Jennifer Saddy, Director, Workers' Compensation-Risk Management for American Airlines, stated that the shoulder injury is now American's number one injury in terms of frequency and severity, surpassing the low back for ramp workers. A research article soon to be published in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (August 2018) authored by Dr. Kalia¹ and others from Johns Hopkins University studied low back, shoulder, knee injuries and other claims for a national beverage company from 2008-2015. The authors report a significant decrease in low back injuries from 2008 to 2015, but an increase in the number of shoulder and knee injuries on a proportionate basis across all injuries. Dr. Kalia studied more than 20,000 claims. Though there was a decrease in low back claims, a greater proportion of the low back claims occurred with the younger worker – less than 30 years of age.

Dr. Kalia indicates there may be several reasons why low back claims have decreased to include better safety management, awareness and ergonomic aids. Research from the IPCS database supports Dr. Kalia's findings in that when studying the changes in absolute shoulder and knee strength from 2008 to 2017, IPCS reports a substantial decrease in absolute strength during the last 10 years and the younger worker (20-29 years of age) showing the greatest decrease (see chart below). This could be another reason why the shoulder and knee claims increased proportionately with Dr. Kalia's study.



Note: 2008 ~24,000 strength tests. 2017 ~ 34,000 strength tests

It is a matter of time before programs designed to increase muscular strength of the shoulders and knees will become routine in the workplace. Not only are the safety efforts put into place over the years making a difference, but what has been done to improve an individual's overall health in the workplace is changing things as well.

When it comes to safety in the workplace, muscular strength is a critical factor to prevent injuries. Further, muscular strength is also now correlated with preventing or reducing the risk for certain diseases.

Maintaining a healthy muscle mass especially as one ages is not only a good health practice, it is vital to our overall wellbeing.

¹Kalia, N., et. al., Significant Decreasing Trend in Low Back Injuries in a Beverage Company. JOEM, Published Ahead of Print 2018.