

# The 6-Step Process to Determine Workers' Comp Injury Causation

**W**orkers' comp injury causation is a process, not an event. Determining whether an injury is work-related requires much more than a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer; it entails a series of steps, each of which must be carefully considered.



**Co-Authors:**

Michael Stack  
Risk Consultant &  
Amaxx Founder



Jacob Lazarovic, MD  
Amaxx Medical Advisor

- 1 Review evidence of the disease; does it exist?
- 2 Review clinical evidence of a causal relationship; do studies support a link?
- 3 Examine evidence of exposure.
- 4 Consider other relevant factors, such as co-morbidities, prior injuries, etc.
- 5 Judge the validity of the testimony; is the injured worker telling the truth?
- 6 Make the causation determination.

*Ref. (2013) AMA Guides to the Evaluation of Disease and Injury Causation. American Medical Association Press.*

## 1 Review Evidence of the Disease

**Dr. Jake:** The first step in the process, evidence of disease, is usually fairly clear. In certain instances, you take into account some subjective factors, but for the most part, there are objective ways to document evidence of the disease, and it is pretty clear-cut.

## 2 Clinical Evidence of a Causal Relationship

In step two, clinical evidence a causal relationship exists, the adjuster/physician reviews published scientific research that supports a link between the functions an employee performs at work and the disease or injury which is present.

*(continued)*

### EXAMPLE 1

#### Upper Limb – Shoulder Tendinopathy, Impingement and Rotator Cuff Tears

| Occupational Risk Factors   |                 | Non-Occupational Risk Factors |                 |
|---|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Factor  | Causation       | Factor                        | Causation       |
| Combination of risk factors (force + repetition, force + posture) | Strong evidence | Age                           | Strong evidence |
| Vibration   | No evidence     | BMI                           | Strong evidence |
| Highly repetitive work (in combination with other factors)        | Strong evidence | Genetics                      | No evidence     |
| Forceful work   | No evidence     | Psychosocial factors          | Strong evidence |
| Awkward postures  | Strong evidence | Diabetes                      | Strong evidence |
| Keyboard activities   | No evidence     | Dominant hand                 | No evidence     |
| Cold environment  | No evidence     | Anatomy (congenital)          | Weak evidence   |
| Length of employment  | No evidence     | Comorbidities                 | No evidence     |
|   |                 | Genetics                      | No evidence     |

■ Strong evidence   
 ■ Weak evidence   
 ■ No evidence

*Data Provided by MyAbilities*



# The 6-Step Process to Determine Workers' Comp Injury Causation

(continued)

Example:

## Upper Limb Shoulder Injury

**Dr. Jake:** *There is clinical research on medical causation which looks at what kinds of occupational and non-occupational factors are correlated with what kinds of medical conditions. The AMA Guides to the Evaluation of Disease and Injury Causation is one very good reference because they've collated much of this research. There are other sources published on this topic as well including the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, which is published by the American College of Occupational Environmental Medicine and various other sources and literature.*

*Typically, what the sources do is identify potential factors and then do the epidemiological research to see if there a connection, and furthermore if there is a strong connection between some of these factors, a weak connection, or no connection.*

*By looking at some of these factors, your claim adjusters, risk managers, and others can have some guidance about whether a particular condition is occupational in origin or not. Of course, if you're in doubt, physician expertise would always be recommended.*

### 3 Evidence of Exposure

Evidence of exposure is an area where employers can make an impact on causation determination. A detailed description of the employee's job functions greatly aids in the evaluation and determination of whether the injury was work-related or not.

Providing physicians with specific information regarding the injured employee's job functions is an area often missed in workers' comp claims management. This information represents an opportunity for improvement in many employers.

### 4 Consider Other Relevant Factors:

Several other relevant factors must be considered when making an injury causation determination. Other factors to consider include comorbid conditions, age, gender, etc.

### 5 Judge Validity of the Testimony

In a causation determination, consideration needs to be given to the validity of the testimony of the injured worker. It must be decided whether their account of the events leading to the injury are accurate or falsely stated.

### 6 Make Causation Determination

The final step of the 6-step process is to carefully consider all of the factors and make the causation determination.

6-Steps to WC Injury Causation sourced from AMA Guides to the Evaluation of Disease and Injury Causation. American Medical Association Press (2013).



**WORKERS' COMP  
TRAINING CENTER**

Copyright 2008-2018 Amaxx LLC. All Rights Reserved.

