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Specialist article: Interview with Dr. Urs Schneider

Conducted by the editorial team of the Content Hub A+A Smarter Working

Editorial Team: Dr. Schneider, musculoskeletal disorders are the leading cause of work disability worldwide. Why is this topic so relevant, especially for young workers?

Dr. Urs Schneider: Musculoskeletal disorders do not only affect older workers but increasingly also younger ones. Prolonged incorrect strain and physically demanding work can lead to complaints early in one's career. With increasing life expectancy and an aging workforce, it is all the more important to implement preventive measures early to avoid long-term impairments.

Editorial Team: What ergonomic principles do you recommend for preventing musculoskeletal disorders?

Dr. Urs Schneider: A well-established approach is the so-called TOP principle. This means that technical measures, such as lifting aids or workplace adjustments, should be implemented first before considering organizational or personal measures. Exoskeletons should only be used when other ergonomic solutions have not been successful. They can be a valuable addition, but they are not the first choice.



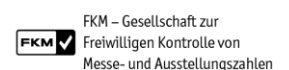
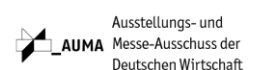
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Editorial Team: What research is Fraunhofer IPA conducting in the field of ergonomics and exoskeletons?

Dr. Urs Schneider: Our institute in Stuttgart is working in several areas. We conduct biomechanical analyses both in the field and in the lab, develop exoskeletons for specific applications, and use digital human models for evaluation and design. Additionally, we test the mechanical properties of exoskeletons using highly reliable methods for product characterization and durability.

Editorial Team: A fascinating new research field is the use of exoskeletons in secondary and tertiary prevention. Can you tell us more about this?

Dr. Urs Schneider: Yes, this is a particularly promising area. Together with integration institutions in Germany, we are investigating whether and how exoskeletons can support people with disabilities. Our goal is to develop a systematic methodology for selecting and implementing this technology.

Editorial Team: What is the EXOWORKATHLON® and what insights does this format provide?

Dr. Urs Schneider: The EXOWORKATHLON® is a prospective exoskeleton study that tests exoskeletons under realistic working conditions. We define various courses in collaboration with experts from relevant industries and the healthcare sector. These courses



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are designed to be practical, feasible, and relevant for exoskeleton applications. Study results and deeper insights can be found at www.exoworkathlon.de.

Editorial Team: What highlights can visitors expect at A+A 2025 in the field of exoskeletons?

Dr. Urs Schneider: A major highlight is the EXO PARK, a large joint stand that we are organizing together with Messe Düsseldorf. Here, visitors can try out exoskeletons for themselves and learn about the latest developments. Additionally, the live demonstration of the EXOWORKATHLON® will showcase how exoskeletons can provide practical support. At the same time, the WearRAcon Europe conference will take place, where experts will discuss technological and ergonomic topics related to exoskeletons.



Editorial Team: Thank you for the interview, Dr. Schneider!

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