Some employers have doctors do medical exams to help keep workers healthy and productive. Or, a new employee may be sent to the doctor before starting the job. The doctor may order tests and treatments. But some tests are not needed. And some treatments may actually be risky for employees. Plus, sometimes this care can be expensive or cause employees to miss work.

Learn more about these tests and treatments below, from experts at the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM).

Tests and treatments your employees may not need
Consider these guidelines when sending workers or job candidates to the doctor

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X-rays rarely show if an employee can do the job.
Often X-rays simply show common problems, such as normal age-related changes.
X-ray results may lead doctors to order more tests or specialist care. But simpler, less costly treatments may be best. They may help relieve pain, prevent injury, and keep a person functioning:
• Learning safer ways to lift things
• Doing physical therapy
• Taking over-the-counter medicines
X-rays also expose people to radiation. A single X-ray is not dangerous, but the risk of developing cancer goes up with more tests.

Usually, X-rays aren’t needed for low back pain. A doctor who checks a job candidate for low back problems should get a detailed patient history and a description of the physical work needed for the job. This will help show if a person can handle the job tasks.
X-rays should only be ordered if the patient has a clear need. For example, a patient has a:

- Fever.
- History of injury.
- Significant loss of ability.
- Bone condition.

**X-rays don’t help to diagnose plantar fasciitis.**

Plantar fasciitis is one of the most common reasons for adult foot pain. It is caused by injured tissue along the bottom of the foot. It can be especially painful for employees who stand or walk at work.

But plantar fasciitis can be diagnosed without an X-ray. To relieve pain, doctors should recommend:

- Certain stretching exercises.
- Losing weight.
- Learning how to slowly bear weight after sitting, or in the morning.
- Avoiding running.

**Don’t ask doctors to order sleep studies for employees with ongoing fatigue or insomnia.**

A sleep study, called a polysomnogram, isn’t usually needed to diagnose insomnia. Instead, doctors should look for causes of poor sleep, such as anxiety, stress, or depression. And they should suggest better sleep habits.

**A sleep study might be needed if** the employee suffers from daytime sleepiness and could have sleep apnea.

- Symptoms of sleep apnea include loud snoring, headache, and waking with a sore throat.
- Risk factors include aging, obesity, male gender, diabetes, or a large neck diameter.

**Ask doctors not to prescribe opioid pain relievers to employees in safety-sensitive jobs.**

Opioids can be dangerous, especially for employees who operate motor vehicles, forklifts, cranes, or other heavy equipment. The drugs cause nearly 17,000 deaths in the U.S. every year.

Doctors too often prescribe opioid pain relievers for chronic pain. And opioids are usually not the best way to treat acute pain. Doctors should recommend over-the-counter pain medicine, exercises, ice, heat, or physical therapy. If employees must take opioids for a short time, be sure that they don’t use heavy machinery or drive a vehicle.