



More than a third of all over-three-day injuries reported each year to HSE and local authorities are caused by manual handling – the transporting or supporting of loads by hand or by bodily force.

Prevention and control of musculoskeletal disorders (MSD's), such as manual handling injuries, has been identified as a priority by the Health and Safety Commission. Taking the action described in this section will help prevent these injuries and is likely to be cost-effective. However you cannot prevent all MSD's, so it is still essential to encourage early reporting of symptoms and make arrangements for the proper treatment and rehabilitation of anybody who does get injured.

The Law

The Manual Handling Regulations require that employers:

- Avoid hazardous operations as far as reasonably practicable.
- Assess the risks of those, which cannot be avoided.

Reduce the risk of injury to employees as far as reasonably practicable by:

- Creating safe systems of work.
- Provide equipment.
- Provide training.

Manual Handling Injuries

1 in 5 people are likely to have a bad back before they retire. Over 25% of reported accidents are associated with manual handling.

Typical Injuries

Bruises, cuts, hernias, wrenched shoulders, crushed fingers and feet, back injuries i.e. strains, fractures, slipped discs, repetitive strain injuries.

Manual Handling

- Learn to lift: Feet apart, back straight, chin in weight close to the body.
- Assess the job: How heavy is it, can I lift it, is it too bulky, do I need help?
- Use of mechanical aids: If there is a truck, trolley, barrow or forklift truck available – use it.
- Ask a workmate to help: Ensure he/she is trained and lift together.

Lifting

The maximum load for an individual depends on their age, sex, build, health, training, expertise and strength.

To minimize the possibility of back injury when lifting or carrying, always:

- Wear suitable clothes – no high heels or tight clothes.
- Assess the job before starting.
- Consider the use of mechanical or human help.

If you must use muscle power then:

- Consider the use of protective equipment i.e. gloves.
- Adopt the correct stance.
- Keep the back straight (not vertical).
- Tuck the chin in.
- Take a good grip.
- Keep the arms as straight as possible and the load close to the body.
- Keep the feet apart and lift with your legs.

Protect your Health – 6 Golden Rules

1. Bend your knees; Take the strain on your legs instead of your back. 2. Keep it close to you; Keep the weight close to your body. 3. Stand straight, don't lean sideways, and keep your spine straight to take the strain. 4. Lift smoothly don't jerk. Take your time and test your strength as you lift. Realise your limitations. 5. Use all available aids. Always use trolleys if available. 6. When in doubt, don't lift. Get help, or use mechanical aid.

Use your head to save your back!

Stop and Think

Plan the lift. Where is the load going to be placed? Use appropriate handling aids if possible. Do you need help with the load? Remove obstructions such as discarded wrapping materials. For a long lift – such as floor to shoulder height – consider resting the load midway on a table or bench in order to change grip.

Place the Feet

Feet apart, giving a balanced and stable base for lifting (tight skirts and unsuitable footwear make this difficult). Leading leg as far forward as is comfortable.

Adopt a Good Posture

Bend the knees, but do not kneel or overspread the knees. Keep the back straight (tucking in the chin helps). If necessary lean forwards over the load a little to get a good grip. Keep shoulders level and facing in the same direction as the hips.

Get a Firm Grip

Try to keep the arms within the boundary formed by the legs. The optimum position and nature of the grip depends on the circumstances and individual preference, but it must be secure. A hook grip is less fatiguing than keeping the fingers straight. If it is necessary to vary the grip as the lift proceeds, do this as smoothly as possible.

Don't Jerk

Carry out the lifting movement smoothly, keeping control of the load.

Move the Feet

Don't twist the trunk when turning to the side.

Keep Close to the Load

Keep the load close to the trunk for as long as possible. Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the trunk. If a close approach to the load is not possible try sliding it towards you before attempting to lift it.

Put Down, Then Adjust

If precise positioning of the load is necessary put it down first, then slide it into the desired position.

Twisting and Turning

Many injuries are caused by over-reaching, twisting and turning, move your feet not your back.