

MANUAL HANDLING IN THE WORKPLACE

Manual handling covers a wide range of activities including, but not limited to, lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, restraining, throwing, and carrying.

Manual handling includes repetitive tasks such as packing, typing, assembling, cleaning, and sorting, using hand-tools, operating machinery and equipment, and handling and restraining animals.

Not all manual handling tasks are hazardous, but because most jobs involve some form of manual handling, most workers are at some risk of a manual handling injury.

Good posture and lifting techniques can help reduce the risks, but research indicates that making changes to workplace design is the most effective way to prevent manual handling injury.

Manual handling – identifying workplace hazards

Some factors in the workplace may increase the risk of an injury occurring. These hazards can be identified in different ways:

- Walk through the workplace and look for potential hazards.
- Talk over risk factors with workers.
- Check through injury records to help pinpoint recurring problems.
- Regularly monitor and update risk identification.
- A professional Workplace Health & Safety audit can help to identify potential injuries from manual handling.

Manual handling – assessing the risks

The next step is to assess which factors are contributing to the risk of injury.

Typical risk factors that can increase the risk of injury include:

- type of work – working in a fixed posture for a prolonged time period
- layout of the workspace – a cramped or poorly designed workspace can force people to assume awkward postures, such as bending or twisting
- weight of an object – a heavy load may be difficult to lift and carry
- location of an object – heavy objects that require an awkward lift, for example above shoulder height or from below knee level
- duration and frequency – increasing the number of times an object is handled or the length of time for which it is handled
- condition of an object – more effort may be required to manipulate badly designed or poorly maintained equipment
- awkward loads – loads that are difficult to grasp, slippery or an awkward shape
- handling a live person or animal – lifting or restraining a person or animal can cause sprains and other injuries.

Reducing or eliminating manual handling risks

After identifying workplace hazards you can do several things to control the risk of manual handling injuries. These tips can help reduce injury at home as well as at work.

Safety suggestions include:

- change the task – ask ‘Does this task need to be carried out? If so, does it have to be done this way?’
- change the object – for example, repack a heavy load into smaller parcels
- change the workspace – for example, use ergonomic furniture and make sure work benches are at optimum heights to limit bending or stretching
- change the environmental conditions – including heat, cold and vibration
- use mechanical aids – such as wheelbarrows, conveyor belts, cranes, trolleys, forklifts
- change the nature of the work – for example, offer frequent breaks or the chance to do different tasks
- offer proper training – inexperienced workers are more likely to be injured.

Manual handling – protecting your back

The back is particularly vulnerable to manual handling injuries. Safety suggestions include controlling risk factors in the workplace, in addition to personal controls:

- Lift and carry loads correctly by keeping the load close to the body and lifting with the thigh muscles.
- Never attempt to lift or carry loads if you think they are too heavy.
- Pushing a load (using your body weight to assist) will be less stressful on your body than pulling a load.
- Use mechanical aids or get help to lift or carry a heavy load whenever possible.
- Organise the work area to reduce the amount of bending, twisting, and stretching required.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Cool down after heavy work with gentle, sustained stretches.
- Improve your fitness – exercise regularly to strengthen muscles and ligaments.
- Warm up cold muscles with gentle stretches before engaging in any manual work.

7 steps to achieve good manual handling techniques

- Plan your lift: Ensure the object is light enough to lift, steady, and unlikely to shift or move. ...
- Position your feet...
- Ensure a good posture...
- Maintain a firm grip...
- Lift smoothly...
- Keeping close to the load...
- Put it down... then adjust it

Work Related Muscular Skeletal Disease (MSD)

WMSD is an injury or disease of the musculoskeletal system. The musculoskeletal system is made up of muscles, bones, joints, and connective tissues.

WMSD may include:

- sprains and strains of muscles, ligaments and tendons.
- back injuries.
- joint and bone injuries or degeneration.
- nerve injuries or compression (for example carpal tunnel syndrome).
- muscular and vascular disorders as a result of hand-arm vibration.
- soft tissue injuries such as hernias.
- chronic pain (pain that lasts longer than three months).
- acute pain (pain that lasts less than three months).

WMSD can happen:

- slowly, through gradual wear and tear from repetitive or continuous movements, including static body positions
- suddenly, through strenuous activity or unexpected movements – for example, handling a load that shifts position.

Manual Handling in the workplace



Examples of Manual Handling Tasks

- Carrying a large number of books.
- Lifting and moving sport equipment.
- Storing and retrieving boxes above or below shoulder height.
- Moving furniture.
- Typing at an incorrectly set-up workstation.
- Hanging art, work/poster.

Manual Handling Risks?

Work related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSD) can occur, in any of the following:

- repeated damage or strain
- a single case of overburdening

WMSD may include injuries to:

- Muscles
- Ligaments
- Intervertebral disc
- Nerves
- Tendons in the wrist, arms, shoulders, neck, or legs

A Workplace Health and Safety audit can help to identify manual handling tasks that might require modification to reduce the possibility of injury in the workplace.

If you currently have an employee with a work-related injury from manual handling or any other cause we here at Community Management Solutions can provide advice and assistance on Workplace Rehabilitation as well as advice on general Workplace Health and Safety issues.

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References

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