



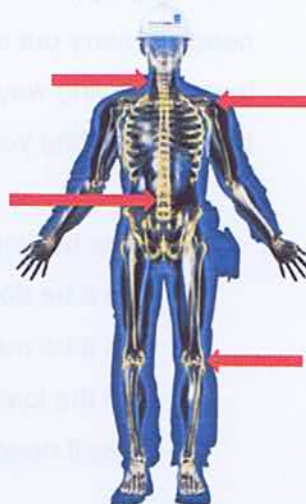
Did you know? ...

Musculoskeletal Disorders

What are the hazards and risk with manual handling?

In Great Britain 1.1 million people suffer from problems with their muscles, joints or tendons caused or made worse by their work. The most common areas of the body to be affected are the back, knees, neck and shoulders.

Construction work can cause short term sprains of the muscles but can also cause long-term damage to the joints, bones and nerves through constant use, resulting in wear and tear on the body. These injuries are known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).



When are you most at risk of damaging yourself and getting a musculoskeletal disorder?

Construction has some of the highest rates of MSDs. The most common injuries are the result of pushing your body beyond its natural limits, but it doesn't always have to involve heavy weights. You are at risk of damaging yourself when carrying out:

Manual handling – which includes lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling and carrying

Repetitive tasks – harm can also result from doing a task repetitively (e.g. block laying, laying kerbs and paving slabs) even if the load is relatively light (e.g. bricklaying), or where the working environment isn't ideal, for example working in awkward positions being cramped, in a tight space, or stretched working overhead (e.g. tying rebar, installing plasterboard or wiring/pipework);



This risk can increase when you are cold as the body becomes less flexible, meaning it will take a lot more energy to carry out the task, whether that is holding a position or moving. If your hands are cold then you could misjudge the amount of force needed and use too much. Using this extra force, or energy, could mean you are more likely to develop a MSD.

What should your employer be doing?

Your employer should be trying to avoid this hazard. If this is not possible then your employer needs to carry out a risk assessment. Starting with assessing the risk of manual handling then identifying ways to get rid of or reduce your exposure to manual handling, or repetitive tasks, protecting your health. This can be done by asking a number of questions, including:

- Does this load need to be handled at all?
- Can it be done in a different way?
- Can it be mechanised or automated?
- Can the load be broken down into smaller or lighter loads?
- Does it need more than one person to carry out the task?



Once your employer has carried out a risk assessment then they must make sure that:

- Control measures are used, for example
 - Making sure lifting aids are used
 - Correct manual handling techniques are used
 - Safe system of work are put in place and worked to, possibly including regular breaks and task rotation
- Provide you with relevant information and training on manual handling and its risks to your health
- If necessary, carry out health surveillance



What health checks do I have?

Carrying out health checks, or surveillance, is important in detecting early signs of damage. For MSDs you can be given a questionnaire to fill in, asking simple questions for example how your back feels when you get up in the morning and if you take a break from your work activity to have a stretch. If your answers show that you may have symptoms of an MSD then



you would need to have further checks, or assessment. In the assessment you may be asked more detailed questions and asked to do some exercises to measure any restricted movement.



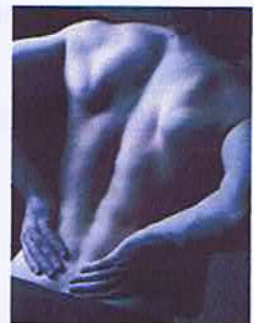
What can I do to protect myself from musculoskeletal disorders?

- Always use mechanical handling methods instead of manual handling if possible, e.g. forklifts/pallet trucks etc.
- Warm up before starting to lift or handle materials
- Don't lift loads above shoulder height or in cramped areas
- Know your capabilities – can you handle the load or do you need assistance?
- Wear suitable clothing and personal protective equipment, such as gloves and safety boots, to protect against cuts, crushed toes etc.
- Ensure there is sufficient space, suitable lighting and a clear route to where you are taking the load

If I notice any of these symptoms what do I need to do?

If you have any of the symptoms below then you may need to change the way you work until things have improved.

- Regular pain, aching, discomfort, numbness, tingling and swelling in your back or other joints and muscles
- Areas of your back often feeling tender
- Limited back motion, with tightness or tenderness in the back muscles
- Back pain during inactivity
- Pain in your buttocks/running down the backs of your legs



Don't forget that manual handling can worsen an existing injury. So if you have a sports injury, may be from football or rugby, then you may have to change your working practice until you are fully recovered.

Remember if you are suffering from a MSD

- You may not be able to manage carry out certain tasks, or physical work, which may affect your future job
- You may not be able to continue everyday activities, including simple things such as playing sport or doing up your shoelaces
- You may have constant pain or discomfort
- If you don't look after your injury then it could result, in the most serious cases, in permanent disability

By the time you start to become aware of the symptoms...your body could be permanently damaged!

If you recognise any of these situations then you need to speak to someone. Speak to your manager or the occupational health nurse or doctor, for general advice you can contact CBH on 0845 873 7726.

Useful Links

HSE website – <http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/>

Backcare - <http://www.backcare.org.uk/>

The charity for healthier backs

CBH – www.cbhscheme.com

