

Manual Handling



Manual handling refers to any activity which requires a person to use force to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain objects (including people and animals).

Manual Handling Injuries

- One in three injuries to Australian workers are caused by manual handling
- Manual handling injuries are not limited to those sustained by lifting or carrying heavy loads
- A person can be injured when manipulating objects in a variety of ways including pulling, pushing, holding and restraining

Considerations

The weight of the load needs to be considered in relation to a number of other risk factors such as the:

- ❖ actions and movements
- ❖ working posture and position when lifting
- ❖ duration and frequency of manual handling
- ❖ location of loads and the distances moved
- ❖ characteristics of the load.



Light loads can still be a problem if for example they are lifted incorrectly or if light loads are lifted in an environment that is unsafe.

Three Steps to Reducing Manual Handling Injuries

The three steps are:

- 1) Identifying the tasks which are risky.
- 2) Assessing those manual handling tasks identified to determine specific risk factors and their importance.
- 3) Reducing or eliminating the risk through redesign, use of mechanical aides and training.

Identifying the Risks

Workers can be at risk of manual handling injuries through poor design or poor work practices.

Risks can be identified in different ways:

- Walk through the workplace and look for potential hazards
- Talk over risk factors with coworkers
- Regularly monitor and update risk identification

Assessing the Risks

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

- **Type of work** - some tasks require fixed postures for long periods of time
- **Layout of the work space** - a poorly designed workspace may force people to maintain awkward postures, such as bending or twisting repetitively
- **Handling time** - the more often an object has to be handled, the greater the chance of injury
- **Weight of the object** - heavy objects that have to be lifted awkwardly, such as from ground level are more likely to cause injury than objects lifted from waist level
- **Equipment** - more effort may be required to manipulate badly designed or poorly maintained equipment
- **The degree of effort** - simply restraining an object such as an animal, can cause sprains and other injuries

Reducing or Eliminating the Risk

- **Change the task** - 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, more manageable parcels
- **Use mechanical aids** - like wheelbarrows, trolleys, Oxford hoists, Sarita lifts
- **Change the workspace** - for example, use ergonomic furniture and make sure work benches are at optimum heights to limit bending or stretching
- **Change the nature of the work** - offer frequent breaks or multi-task
- **Seek proper training** - inexperienced workers are more likely to be injured

Protecting Your Back

Your back is particularly vulnerable to manual handling injuries.

Suggestions to protect your back include:

- ✓ Warm up cold muscles thoroughly before engaging in any manual work
- ✓ Lift and carry heavy loads correctly, by keeping the load close to the body and lifting with the thigh muscles
- ✓ Never attempt to carry or lift loads in excess of the recommended maximum limit for one person
- ✓ Maintain correct posture
- ✓ Take frequent breaks
- ✓ Organise the work area to reduce the amount of bending, twisting and stretching required
- ✓ Get help to lift or carry a heavy load whenever possible, using another worker or appropriate mechanical aids
- ✓ Cool down after heavy work with gentle, sustained stretches
- ✓ Exercise regularly to strengthen muscles & ligaments

MSD's



Manual handling injuries are known as musculoskeletal disorders or MSD's.

These can easily be prevented by reducing or eliminating the risks.



Symptoms of incorrect manual handling

- ❖ Back or neck pain
- ❖ Pain in wrists shoulder or arms
- ❖ Stabbing pains in arms or legs
- ❖ Painful joints
- ❖ Pain, tingling or numbness in hands or feet



- ❖ Weakness or clumsiness
- ❖ Heaviness
- ❖ Burning sensations
- ❖ Stiffness
- ❖ Swelling

If you start to experience any of this pain, stop what you are doing and do some stretches.

Things to Remember

- One in three injuries to Australian workers are caused by manual handling
- Changing the workplace design is a more effective way to prevent manual handling injuries than improving posture and lifting techniques



High Risk Work Practices

The following are practices that could increase your chances of a manual handling injury:

- Handling awkward shapes or big loads.
- Handling weights that are beyond your capacity.
- Over-reaching position (lifting from below mid-thigh or above shoulder height).
- Handling where the work surface is unstable.
- Repetitive or long duration manual handling.
- Carrying objects away from your body.
- Awkward twisting of your body.
- Obstructed pathways.
- Insecure grip and poor lifting position with your feet too close together.



Stretching

Following are some tips on how you can prevent manual handling injuries.

- Stretch prior to doing any manual handling tasks.
- Exercise and take short breaks frequently
- Cool down after any heavy lifting/manual handling.
- Prevention is better than cure! You can do just a few of the exercises anytime during the day. Try some of them before you get stiff and sore.
- Include a variety of movements in your workday.
- Some stretches may cause you pain or discomfort. If this occurs, stop the stretch immediately.

