

Manual Handling in the Workplace

Manual handling involves the lifting, putting down, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving of a load. This includes pulling on a rope or lever, as well as directly handling the load.

According to the Health and Safety Executive statistics 498,000 workers suffered from work-related musculoskeletal disorders (either new or long-standing) in 2018/19.

It is also estimated that 6.9 million working days were lost due to such disorders in 2018/19.

Key risk factors with poor manual handling

- **Spinal injuries** – the vast majority of back problems are caused by disc lesions. When upright, the back is able to withstand considerable stress directly through the length of the spine, but when the back is bent, the stress is concentrated at one point.
- **Hernias** – when the body is in a bent position the risk of hernia is increased.
- **Cuts, abrasions and fractures** – including failing to check for sharp edges or nails when picking up a load, tripping over objects left lying around and not wearing the correct protective clothing.

Recommendations for employers

- Assess the manual handling activity in detail
- reduce the need for manual handling in the workplace, either by eliminating completely, or by use of work equipment such as conveyors or fork lift trucks
- if manual handling cannot be avoided then minimise the dangers by using trolleys, stacker trucks or similar equipment
- train employees in good and safe manual handling techniques
- supply suitable information on the load to be lifted
- provide the right equipment to handle the load safely.

Summary

- **Avoid** manual handling operations where possible.
- **Assess** the risks of any unavoidable hazardous operations.
- **Eliminate** or control the risk of injury, using an assessment as a basis for action.

“Ensure that a risk assessment is always carried out when manual handling”

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 places a general duty for employers to conduct a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of their employees while at work.
- The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) contain more specific duties in terms of manual handling including specific risk assessment and training provisions.