

Managing the risks from manual handling

Information sheet 4

Manual handling is a major cause of back pain. You can often avoid it or reduce the risk. Here are some questions to help you gauge whether your organisation is taking simple steps to tackle manual handling risks and back pain.

Understand the problem and agree to solve it

- Do all managers recognise manual handling risks and support the action needed to manage them?
- Does the way the business is run enable people to carry out those actions?

Get the right people involved

Workers have an important part to play and should have a chance to input at every stage.

- Are workers/safety representatives involved in identifying and solving manual handling problems?
- Is their input encouraged and valued?
- Does everyone know what part they have to play?
- Is everyone – both workers and managers – aware of the need for joint problem solving?

Assess the risks from manual handling

- Are workers at risk of back pain or injury?
- Are there manual handling risk factors in the work they are doing? For example, twisting, stooping, reaching, bad posture, carrying heavy loads, slippery floors.
- Where does action need to be taken? See the *Manual Handling Assessment Charts (MAC): FAQs* sheet in this pack for further information.



Avoid or, where this is not possible, reduce the risks from manual handling

- Have you taken action to avoid risky manual handling?
- If not, has the risk been reduced, eg by using handling aids, or reducing the risk factors identified above?
- Have these solutions worked?
- Have they created other problems?
- Are there any other steps you can take? If so, have you prioritised what to do first?

Train and inform

- Do managers and workers have the skills and information to play their part or do they need training and/or information? See the *Manual handling training courses* sheet in this pack.

Managing back pain

- Do systems allow workers to report back pain and symptoms as early as possible?
- Are there systems for reviewing work activities, managing sickness absence and return to work? See the sheets *A short guide to managing sickness absence* and *Managing sickness absence and return to work: Practical advice for employers and managers* in this pack for more detail.
- Have workers or their representatives contributed to the design of systems?
- Is there occupational health support available when needed?
- Are workers and managers aware of the need to stay active with back pain? (See the *Stay active* sheet in this pack for more detail.)

Carry out regular checks

- Do you check that controls and systems are used and check that they work?
- Is the aim to continuously improve by further reducing manual handling risk and managing back pain where possible?
- Are the steps in this sheet applied as intended and is this regularly reviewed?

Want to know more?

For further information about risk factors, assessments and controls, pushing and pulling, handling technique and law, please see the following HSE publications in this pack:

Manual handling assessment charts Leaflet INDG383 HSE Books 2003 (single copy free or priced packs of 10 ISBN 0 7176 2741 1) Web version: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg383.pdf

Getting to grips with manual handling: A short guide Leaflet INDG143(rev2) HSE Books 2004 (single copy free or priced packs of 15 ISBN 0 7176 2828 0) Web version: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg143.pdf

Are you making the best use of lifting and handling aids? Leaflet INDG398 HSE Books 2004 (single copy free or priced packs of 15 ISBN 0 7176 2900 7) Web version: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg398.pdf

Lifting aids price guide (in this pack)

For more information on manual handling regulations, please refer to *Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended). Guidance on Regulations L23* (Third edition) HSE Books 2004 ISBN 0 7176 2823 X

For more information about tackling back pain and the Better Backs campaign, visit: betterbacks.hse.gov.uk or phone HSE's Infoline on: 0845 345 0055

For more information on managing sickness absence, visit: www.hse.gov.uk/sicknessabsence

For more information on involving workers in health and safety management, visit: www.hse.gov.uk/involvement

For free practical advice on health, safety and return to work issues please contact Workplace Health Connect on: 0845 609 6006