

Better Backs campaign

A national publicity, inspection and stakeholder campaign to tackle back pain at work

Welcome to the Better Backs campaign pack

This pack will support activities promoting Better Backs and tackling back pain at work. It will help you identify areas where you can make a difference and a range of remedies. There are practical things you can do whether you are an employer, manager, worker, safety representative, health or safety professional and/or service provider.

The pack includes information sheets, leaflets and a CD.

What is Better Backs?

This year, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), will again be working in partnership with local authorities to deliver a national campaign tackling back pain in the workplace. Running from October, Better Backs aims to reduce the incidence of back pain caused or made worse by work, its impact and the number of working days lost due to back pain.

The campaign will build on the success of last year's Backs! 2005 campaign and also extend its scope. The focus will be on the holistic approach needed to manage back pain. Like last year, Better Backs will promote sensible workplace precautions that reduce the risk of back pain. This year, the campaign will also emphasise the positive benefits of staying active with back pain. At the same time, it will encourage employers and employees/workers to work together to help people return to normal activities, including work.

Better Backs will include workplace inspections, mass media advertising and events. The inspection element of the campaign will run for three weeks between 16 October and 5 November, while mass media advertising and events will occur over a longer period.



HSE is keen to involve other bodies, trade associations and businesses in the campaign, so funding is available to run campaign events. Funding criteria, an application form and further details are available at betterbacks.hse.gov.uk. Alternatively, please e-mail us at betterbacks@hse.gsi.gov.uk if you have any funding questions.

Why is there a campaign?

Many workers suffer back pain. This is bad for them and for business. Everyone can do something to minimise back pain and reduce its impact. Whether you are an employee or an employer, Better Backs will help you identify where you can take action.

What is the extent of the problem?

- Two million people in Great Britain suffered work-related ill health in 2004/5.
- One in six days lost were due to back pain accounting for 4.9 million working days lost (according to the *Self-reported Work-related Illness (SWI) Survey 2003/4*), with an average time off per person of 19 days.
- Musculoskeletal disorders cost the economy about £5.7 billion in 1995/6 (these cause discomfort in bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments etc and include back pain).
- Back pain creates a significant impact on the social and working lives of those involved.

What do you need to do?

- Plan to keep in touch with staff who are off work, encourage them to stay active and help them return to work.
- Identify activities which present a risk and examine how these can be made safer - MAC can help (see the *Manual Handling Assessment Charts (MAC): FAQs* sheet and *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).
- Prioritise action – sort out the things that will have most impact first.
- Keep it simple – choose sensible approaches and solutions.
- Check solutions for new risks, eg excessive pushing/pulling, poor posture, vehicle movements.
- Involve workers or their representatives in:
 - assessing risk;
 - choosing solutions;
 - monitoring and feeding back on how well solutions work;
 - helping those with back pain remain active and stay in work.

What is in the pack?

The pack contains the following material:

- The *Stay active* sheet promotes the advice that staying active helps you manage your back pain and your life. This is evidence-based advice supported by health professionals.
- The sheet *A short guide to managing sickness absence* gives practical advice about how to help back pain sufferers remain at or return to work and complements the advice in *Stay active*.
- The *Managing sickness absence and return to work: Practical advice for employers and managers* sheet provides a summary of HSE's guidance booklet *Managing sickness absence and return to work: An employer's and manager's guide* HSG249 HSE Books 2004 ISBN 0 7176 2882 5.

- The *Managing the risks from manual handling* sheet sets out a simple approach to working together to manage handling and back pain.
- *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 is a basic tool to help assess the risk from lifting, carrying and team lifting operations. It uses a traffic light system to show risk factors that need attention and also helps to identify those tasks which need attention first.
- The *Manual Handling Assessment Charts (MAC): FAQs* sheet answers basic questions about MAC.
- *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 gives help on assessment, pushing and pulling, handling technique and the law.
- *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 shows the types of handling aids available for a wide range of tasks and includes things to consider when choosing handling aids.
- The *Lifting aids price guide* gives guide prices for purchase/hire of the lifting/handling aids illustrated in INDG398.
- The *Manual handling training courses* sheet shows what a good training course would cover.
- The Better Backs CD will contain all the materials described above and supporting PowerPoint presentations.

Want to know more?

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