



# **SME Risk Management Guide**

## Manual handling





## Why is this important?

Up to 60% of the adult population can expect to have low back pain at some time in their life and back pain is the largest single cause of disability in the UK, with lower back pain alone accounting for 11% of the total disability of the UK population.

In 2020/2021 it was estimated that 182,000 workers suffered from new or long-standing back pain. The NHS in England spends £200m a year just on spinal surgery and overall, it's estimated that back pain costs the UK economy £10 billion a year. Whilst there are more incidents in industries where heavy manual handling is required, they occur across all type of industries even in what might be thought of as low risk office environments.

### What do I need to think about?

- Remember that manual handling includes pushing and pulling items as well as lifting, carrying, and moving items.
- Review equipment and processes to see if you can remove the need for manual handling in any areas, or reduce the risks associated with it. This might be by changing processes or using lifting aids or trolleys or other equipment to help reduce these risks.
- Have manual handling risk assessments been tailored to the task and the environment in which the tasks are completed?
- The item being manually handled and the capabilities of the people completing the task, including considering any people who may need different controls to others.
- The risks associated with repetitive tasks, as even light tasks can cause an issue if repeated frequently or over a long period of time.
- Normal working hours and shift patterns when looking at what's reasonable and safe.
- Is any PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), such as gloves, required to help safely handle items.



# What do I need to put into place?

- Undertake risk assessments for all your manual handling tasks, making sure they're tailored to the task and the environment in which the tasks are completed. The HSE website provides examples of different risk assessment templates and tools that can be used to help complete your own manual handling risk assessments: [Toolkit for assessing musculoskeletal disorders risk - HSE](#) and [Full manual handling risk assessment: Examples of assessment checklists \(hse.gov.uk\)](#).

Plus the HSE provide examples and a template for general risk assessments that can be used for recording lower risk manual handling activities: [Risk assessment: Template and examples - HSE](#).

- Put into place all the controls that you've identified as being required to reduce the risk in your risk assessments. This could include:
  - » Removing the need to complete manual handling or reducing the risks associated with it, by changing

- processes or introducing the use of equipment.
- » Having controls that are tailored to the task, environment and individual.
- » Reducing the weight of items.
- » Rotating team members to reduce the overall manual handling completed by each person.
- » Clearly identifying when and how any manual handling should be completed as a team of more than one person.
- » Details of any equipment that should be used and how to use safely.
- » Maintenance and inspection details for all equipment.
- » The process for reporting defects and other issues and how these should be managed until the defects or issues have been repaired or rectified.

- » Reviewing accidents and incidents to help identify where further improvements can be made.
- » Making sure that all risk assessments are reviewed regularly (annually or when there are major changes to the business).
- Make sure that all employees are trained on the controls that are in place. This needs to include:
  - » New employees before they start to complete tasks.
  - » Existing employees when new processes, equipment and controls are introduced.
  - » Regular refresher training for all.
  - » Make sure appropriate training is put in place for agency or temporary employees.
  - » Remember to keep records of all training.



# Common mistakes to try to avoid

- Risk assessments not tailored to the task or the environment in which the tasks are completed.
- Risk assessments that haven't been regularly reviewed and updated as necessary.
- The risks associated with repetitive tasks haven't been properly assessed.
- Process changes or equipment to remove the need to complete manual handling or to reduce the risks associated with it haven't been put into place.
- Equipment and processes haven't been used to remove the need for manual handling or to reduce the risks in areas where this could easily have been implemented.
- Training hasn't been fully completed and recorded.
- Training isn't followed, and short cuts are taken leading to accidents.

## Where can I find more information?

The HSE (Health and Safety executive) provides more information and guidance on manual handling at:

- [Musculoskeletal disorders in the workplace - HSE](#)
- [Manual handling at work: Assess manual handling you can't avoid - HSE](#)
- [Toolkit for assessing musculoskeletal disorders risk - HSE](#)

General risk assessment guidance: Risk assessment:

- [Template and examples - HSE](#)

## References: Manual handling:

- [Prevalence | Background information | Back pain - low \(without radiculopathy\) | CKS | NICE](#)
- [Health and safety statistics 2021 \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)
- [British Pain Society Press release: Chronic pain costs the UK £billions but research funding is inadequate | News | British Pain Society](#)



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