Working together for better workplace health

MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS
Musculoskeletal Disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD’s) are problems affecting the muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves or other soft tissues and joints. MSD’s are the most common occupational illness in the United Kingdom, affecting 1.0 million people a year. They include problems such as low back pain, joint injuries and repetitive strain injuries of various sorts. Injury can happen whilst doing any activity that involves some movement of the body, from heavy lifting to typing.

There are certain tasks and factors that increase the risk such as:

1. repetitive and heavy lifting
2. bending and twisting
3. repeating an action too frequently
4. uncomfortable working position
5. exerting too much force
6. working too long without breaks
7. adverse working environment (e.g. too hot/cold)
8. psychosocial factors (e.g. high job demands, time pressures and lack of control).
9. whole body vibration

Because there are no valid methods for detecting MSD’s there are no legal requirements for undertaking mandatory health surveillance, however, symptoms can and should be regularly monitored in order to detect symptoms early and ensure the worker gets appropriate advice and treatment and importantly, modifying the work where practicable.

What is the process for monitoring for MSD’s

A musculoskeletal questionnaire can be completed periodically and returned to the Occupational Health Service Provider (OHSP).

A responsible person can be trained and appointed so that employees can report any musculoskeletal symptoms. The reporting of musculoskeletal symptoms should lead to referral to the OHSP for more detailed assessment.

It is recommended that a statement of fitness to continue in work with exposure to musculoskeletal or manual handling hazards should be recorded including any advised restrictions.

Purpose of monitoring for MSD’s

There are no well founded methods for selecting workers to predict future musculoskeletal problems. However, the aim of health monitoring for musculoskeletal disorders is to detect symptoms early and ensure the worker gets appropriate advice and treatment and importantly, modify their work where practicable.
Relevant Regulations
This list is not exhaustive:

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (as amended)
Equality Act 2010
The Data Protection Act 1998
Access to Medical Reports Act  should this be 1998?
Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended)
Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR)

You need to comply with the risk assessment requirements set out in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) (MHOR) apply to all construction work. If you cannot avoid manual handling and there is a risk of injury, you must assess the job and take steps to reduce the risk of harm.

The Regulations require employers to:

- Avoid manual handling operations if at all possible, e.g. provide mechanical handling equipment
- If the job can’t be avoided, carry out a risk assessment and put in control measures to reduce the risk to health to the lowest level reasonably practicable

What should you do?
Develop a simple policy for MSDs. An example MSD policy statement is given on the page??.

Identify someone who is to be responsible for MSDs on site

This could be a manager or supervisor. You should ensure that they have been given sufficient training and information to recognise musculoskeletal related hazards and risks.

What should you do if you have identified a problem?

- put some control measures into place and make sure they are regularly checked
- assess the risk to the health of your workers and plan for its control. Involve workers in these assessments. A good way to do this is to use the HSE Manual Handling Assessment (MAC) tool, which has been developed to help the user identify high risk workplace manual handling activities. The tool can be used to assess the risks posed by lifting, carrying and team manual handling activities. It is designed to help you understand, interpret and categorise the level of
risk of the various known risk factors associated with manual handling activities. The MAC incorporates a numerical and a colour coding score system to highlight high risk manual handling tasks. Available from www.hse.gov.uk

- train supervisors and workers to recognise and report the early signs and warning symptoms. Supervisors should be alert for signs of problems, for example improvisations such as support bandages or belts
- train supervisors and workers in preventative measures (e.g. positioning materials, equipment, etc. in a more convenient position, good working techniques and working posture, short pauses in work) relevant to the workplace
- build in flexibility in job design, encouraging workers to take rest breaks as needed
- ensure that the tools and equipment that are used are comfortable and don’t require excessive force to operate
- consult workers and safety representatives during assessment and when considering possible solutions
- request equipment on trial basis, if possible, to check it solves the problem; again involve workers who will be expected to use it
- check lifting equipment is CE-marked
- consider what maintenance will be required
- consider other risks associated with introducing the lifting aid, e.g. site safety

Get it wrong today and your workers could suffer the consequences tomorrow

.......and potentially for the rest of their lives!

Pre-placement health assessment

On commencement of employment with you, do you check to see if your workers have any health issues which may require additional control measures implemented? If not, how do you know whether or not they have musculo-skeletal problems that may be affected by their work?

A pre-placement health assessment is a good way of obtaining base line information about a person, i.e. they may, because of previous jobs, already suffer a degree of musculo-skeletal problems, and may require a higher degree of protection.

Remember that this makes good business sense, especially to due to an increase in litigation claims.

It does not have to be a complex or complicated system, it could be as simple as a questionnaire which is sent to the employee who then completes and forwards it to an occupational health provider. This need not be expensive either, a simple assessment costs on average between £18 and £25 per pre placement questionnaire reviewed. The occupational health provider may advise on conducting baseline a health check, i.e. a mobility assessment.

Please note: A pre-placement health questionnaire should in all cases be assessed by a suitably qualified person, such as an accredited OHSP and NOT left to the HR department!
Health monitoring for MSD’s

The law does not yet require health surveillance or health monitoring for workers exposed to the risks of MSD because there is no accepted valid technique for detecting the early signs of MSD injuries, however voluntary health monitoring is an informal, method of surveying the workforce for symptoms of ill health including low back pain.

Workers should be encouraged to report any symptoms relating to the back that they may be experiencing as soon as possible and Managers should seriously consider investigating them, particularly from individuals who may be involved in ‘high-risk activities or processes’ and seek professional medical assistance from a CBH accredited OHSP.

All staff should be aware of the increased potential risks of back injury to:

- those persons reporting persistent back pain
- those persons with an existing relevant health problem

Record keeping

Appropriate occupational health notes should be completed with a record of health surveillance.

Reports

A Health Record should be set up, including:

Employee surname and forenames

Gender

Date of birth

Permanent address and postcode

National Insurance number

Date of commencement of present employment

Historical record of jobs involving exposure to activities requiring health surveillance in this employment.

Date and results of the musculoskeletal assessment, with any conclusions only relating to an individual’s fitness to work

Conclusions should be expressed in terms of the employee’s fitness for task and will include the conclusions of the occupational health professional or responsible person, but NOT “confidential clinical data.” Health records should not contain personal medical information. This must be kept separately and in confidence by the OHSP.

Each health record should be kept up to date and retained for as long as the employee is under health surveillance. It is good practice to offer individual workers a copy of their health records when they leave the job.
Example MSD policy statement
The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) apply to our work activities.

We consider that preventing this type of injury in our business will improve morale and contribute significantly to our profitability by reducing potential losses.

In consideration of their special needs, we will take additional measures to secure the safety of young workers (under eighteen years old) and pregnant or nursing mothers, including modifying our manual handling risk assessments.

Manual handling operations will be assessed for all activities for any loads other than those which are clearly not significant.

Manual handling operations in areas or under conditions that may alter the risk will be assessed.

Training in lifting techniques can significantly reduce the risk of injury and will be provided for staff involved in all operations identified as having a significant risk.

All manual handling operations identified as having a significant risk will have the results of the assessment recorded, whether or not the assessment can easily be repeated, in order to demonstrate that it can be carried out.

Signed

(Chairman / Managing Director / Senior Partner)

Date

Expert help is available from:

Constructing Better Health
Contact us for impartial and confidential advice:

tel: 0845 873 7726 or click on www.cbhscheme.com

CBH accredited occupational health service providers listed on the CBH website

Further information regarding preventative measures can be found on the HSE website in the Construction Occupational Health Management Essentials toolkit (COHME).

www.hse.gov.uk