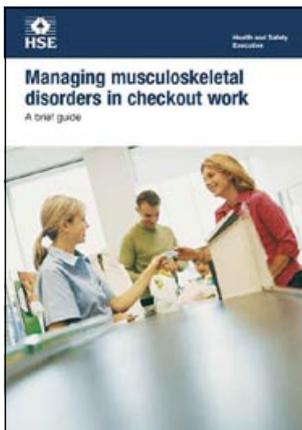


Managing musculoskeletal disorders in checkout work

A brief guide



This is a web-friendly version of leaflet INDG269(rev1), published 04/13

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet will help employers manage checkout work at point of sale and reduce the risk of their workers suffering from musculoskeletal disorders ().

Working at a point of sale in a busy store can lead to aches and pains. If these are not dealt with they can cause more serious ill health.

The retail industry employs over 3 million people, around 10% of the working population, and a significant percentage of this workforce is in an age group considered particularly vulnerable to MSDs.

What are MSDs?

The term MSD covers any injury, damage or disorder of the joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves or other soft tissues in the upper/lower limbs or the back.

The common symptom is pain but other symptoms may include discomfort, tingling, numbness, stiffness or swelling. Most MSD symptoms will clear up without any need of medical attention. More information is available at www.hse.gov.uk/msd.

Who should read this leaflet?

Anyone who owns, manages or works in a large or small retail store, should find this leaflet useful. But it is mainly aimed at managers and those responsible for health and safety in the store. It will also be useful to employees and their representatives.

Where do I start?

A good starting point is to walk around your checkout or point of sale area and look for any hazards – a **hazard** is anything that may cause harm.

Then think about the risks – a **risk** is the chance, high or low, of somebody being harmed by the hazard, and how serious the harm could be.

Ask your employees what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious to you and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks. Concentrate on the real risks – those that are most likely to cause harm.

Consider the measures you are already taking to control the risks and ask if there is anything you should do to make your workplace safer. Once you have assessed the risks you need to consider the following:

- Can you avoid the risk?
- If not, can you reduce it?
- Can you control it?

Write down your significant findings and share them with your workforce. Keep it simple. If you have fewer than five employees you do not have to write anything down, but it is useful to do this so you can review it at a later date, eg if something changes.

To make life easier, model risk assessments and a template can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/risk. There is also advice on managing risk in *Health and safety made simple: The basics for your business* (see 'Find out more').

Who is responsible for the assessment?

As an employer, you should appoint someone competent to help you meet your health and safety duties. A competent person is someone with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to manage health and safety.

You could appoint (one or a combination of):

- yourself;
- one or more of your workers;
- someone from outside your business.

You probably manage most aspects of your business yourself, or with the help of your staff. But if you are not confident of your ability to manage all health and safety in-house, you may need some external help or advice.

National companies are likely to have a central health and safety unit that provides advice to individual stores and may also carry out risk assessments for tasks common to all stores. These may be cascaded to local managers as a set of instructions on how to carry out a task, or operate a checkout.

The risk assessments on which these are based do not need to be held locally, provided they are easily retrievable for use by local managers and others.

Managers should have the necessary information and training to interpret the instructions and ensure workers follow them. They should:

- assess and manage risks specific to their store;
- be familiar with their company's health and safety policy;
- know where to refer problems they cannot solve themselves.

Consulting your employees

Workplaces where employees are involved in taking decisions about health and safety are safer and healthier. Collaboration with your employees helps you to manage health and safety in a practical way by:

- helping you spot workplace risks;
- making sure health and safety controls are practical;
- increasing the level of commitment to working in a safe and healthy way;
- providing feedback on the effectiveness of your arrangements and control measures.

You are legally required to consult with all your employees, in good time, on health and safety matters. In workplaces where a trade union is recognised, this will be through union health and safety representatives. In non-unionised workplaces, you can consult either directly or through other elected representatives.

Consultation involves employers not only giving information to employees but also listening to them and taking account of what they say before making health and safety decisions.

Issues you should consult employees on could include:

- health and safety and the work they do;
- how risks are controlled;
- the best ways of providing information and training;
- staff sickness absence and accident records.

There is more information on your legal duties in the HSE leaflet *Consulting employees on health and safety: A brief guide to the law* (INDG232) – see ‘Find out more’.

Our worker involvement website has more information on consulting with your employees (www.hse.gov.uk/involvement).

Controlling the risks

The key MSD risks in point-of-sale work are in these areas:

- manual handling and lifting of goods;
- awkward postures, such as twisting, reaching and leaning or using a lot of force;
- static and cramped postures;
- work organisation factors.

Manual handling and lifting goods

Manual handling injuries can occur almost anywhere in the workplace. Heavy manual labour, awkward postures and previous or existing injury can increase the risk.

Where it is not possible to avoid handling a load, employers should look at the risks of that task and put sensible health and safety measures in place to prevent and avoid injury.

Where there is a need to lift, always consider the capability of the individual and:

- reduce the amount of twisting, stooping and reaching;
- avoid lifting from floor level;
- minimise carrying distances;
- assess the weight to be carried and whether the worker will need help.

Awkward postures – twisting, reaching, leaning or using a lot of force

Good workstation design helps reduce injury or ill health. Make sure workstations are designed to help workers carry out their tasks with ease of access to equipment and controls. In particular, consider the following issues.

Static and fixed/cramped postures

Sitting or standing for long periods without movement can affect muscles and lead to fatigue and pain through reduced blood circulation.

Provide suitable, adjustable seating and footrests if required for workers when most of their job can be done in a sitting position. Introduce breaks in activity through organised/scheduled rest breaks or encourage task variety and job rotation.

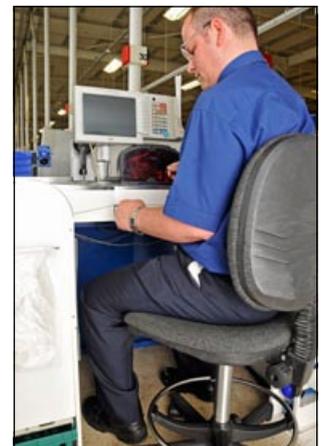
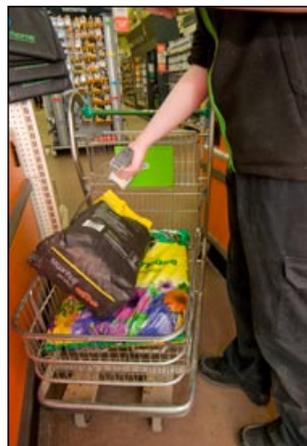
Work organisation factors

To ensure health and safety is managed effectively you should also:

- maintain equipment and encourage workers to report problems as this will help to prevent similar issues occurring;
- monitor the health of employees so you are aware of health problems and can intervene to prevent them being caused or made worse by work activities;
- provide training about the job that is relevant and effective. This should take place during work hours and should be provided free of charge.

Equipment

- Is there enough space under the counter to move and stretch?
Change storage arrangements to give counter staff more room.
- Are there problems with items failing to scan?
Use hand-held scanners for large or bulky items to prevent awkward postures.
- Can the equipment be adjusted to suit individuals?
Supply adjustable seating and allow staff to stand or sit, or provide footrests for those who require additional support.
- Are there ridges in the surfaces over which items are dragged and are edges smooth or rounded to avoid uncomfortable pressure?
Consider a redesign or adaptation to remove ridges and sharp edges.
- Is equipment regularly maintained and checked?
Make sure all equipment is regularly maintained and checked.



Load

- Can heavy items be scanned and passed to the customer without lifting them?
Slide items over surfaces if possible and use inline weighing scales to reduce handling.
- Are items frequently lifted into customers' bags and can security tags be removed easily?
Use hand-held scanners for large or bulky items to prevent manual handling.
- Are there appropriate arrangements in place to deal with the heaviest and bulkiest items sold?
Have a system to enter codes without having to scan heavy or awkward items.



Individuals

- Does anyone need temporary arrangements and do workers know how to report problems?
Pregnant workers may require some temporary adjustments to the work space, or their work schedule. The law requires you to make these, so far as reasonably practicable.
- Do workers know how to adjust the equipment and do they take the time to set it up properly?
Ensure seating and other equipment are adjusted to individual need and suitable training is given.



- Have workers received training and information about their jobs?
Job rotation can reduce the length of time exposed to fixed postures.
- Do any of your workers already have an MSD that requires special adaptations?
Allow staff to vary the task, eg by switching from left- to right-handed scanning at checkouts and postures between sitting and standing.

Task

- Are the most used items within easy reach, including the keypad?
Arrange/organise/design the most used equipment, ie ensure the keypad, scanner and cash drawer are within easy reach.
- Is most of the work carried out just below elbow level and is the cash drawer easy to access?
Ensure the workstation's design means it's at a suitable height.
- Is most of the work done without awkward reaching or twisting from the waist?
Put security tags and their removers where they can be easily reached by staff to avoid awkward movements.
- Do workers have to twist their hands to scan items?
Reduce the need for workers to twist their hands to scan items.
- Can the display screen be read without twisting or squinting?
Where card readers are difficult for staff to reach, they should ask customers to insert and remove their cards.
- Can staff ask for assistance if they need help?
Provide suitable guidance.
- Are seasonal items too bulky or heavy?
Make temporary arrangements, eg supply additional barcode cards to help scanning and avoid lifting.



Environment

- Is the point of sale draughty, too hot or cold?
If open doors cause draughts, consider measures such as hallways, door closers or screens to alleviate the problem.
- Is there a problem with glare from external or internal light sources during any part of the day?
Use blinds to reduce glare on screens or high temperatures caused by direct sunlight.
- Is the point of sale cluttered with stuff that gets in the way?
Ensure consumables are properly stored at the point of sale to reduce clutter.



Advice for health and safety representatives

If you are a trade union appointed health and safety representative, your functions are set out in the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977.

If you are a representative of employee safety, your functions are set out in the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996. It is good practice for employers to give non-unionised representatives the same functions as unionised representatives.

Two key functions of unionised representatives are the power to investigate potential hazards and to investigate complaints by employees they represent. You can use these investigative powers to identify work-related risks to health using simple techniques such as body-mapping or informal surveys of workers.

Body-mapping involves getting a group of workers around a chart with front and back views of a body. Workers are asked to mark on the chart where they suffer pain or injuries. The discussion should quickly identify any common concerns and can also help identify practical solutions.

Where it is not practical to get workers together in a group to do the body-mapping exercise, using simple questionnaires to ask individual workers the same questions in an informal survey can also help to identify specific problems.

Workers may often be more willing to confide in a representative when discussing possible work-related health risks than they would if a manager was asking the same questions. By sharing the anonymised results of a survey or a body-mapping exercise, representatives can help management reduce risks.

When colleagues come back after being off work with an MSD they may be more vulnerable to health risks. They may also need adjustments to their work pattern or job tasks. If possible, talk to the person's manager about what temporary changes might make the return to work a success.

Acknowledgements

HSE would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Association of Convenience Stores, Home Retail Group, Local Government Regulation, Tesco, UNITE and USDAW in preparing this advice.

The photographs in this publication were staged for illustration purposes only, in order to show both good and bad practice.

Find out more

Health and safety made simple: The basics for your business
Leaflet INDG449 HSE Books 2011 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg449.htm
Microsite: www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety

Manual handling at work: A brief guide Leaflet INDG143(rev3) HSE Books 2012
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg143.htm

Consulting employees on health and safety: A brief guide to the law Leaflet INDG232(rev1) HSE Books 2008 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg232.htm

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit www.hse.gov.uk. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory, unless specifically stated, and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance.

This leaflet is available at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg269.htm.

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