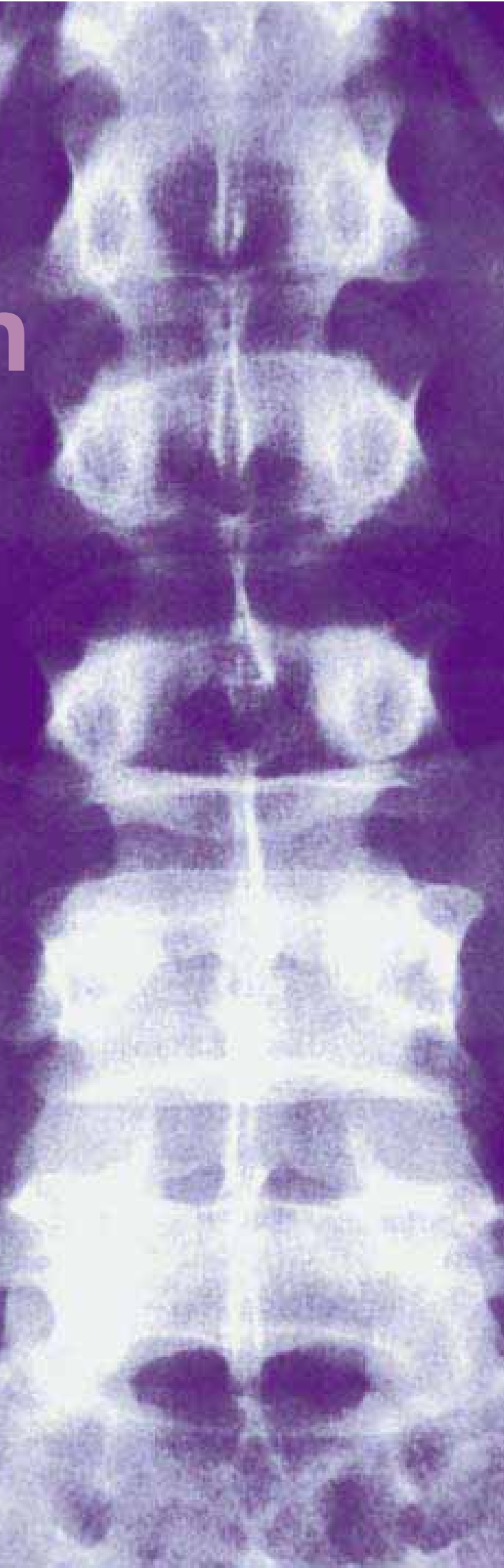




Health and Safety
Executive

Back health at work





Back pain. How you can avoid it.

“5 million adults consult their GP annually about back pain.”

Back pain doesn't just hurt your back. It can hurt your finances and your lifestyle.

Whether you're lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling or carrying, manual handling can be a minefield.

This guide offers some sensible tips on how to prevent yourself or, if you're an employer, your workers, from becoming one of the million plus people in Great Britain who suffer from work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

And if you are an employee, **don't** make the mistake of thinking that back care is up to your employer. If you injure your back, ultimately it will be you who pays the price.

So, whatever you do, watch your back.

Interesting facts and figures

- 2.2 million people in Great Britain suffered from work-related ill health in 2003/04 – one in five of those involved a bad back
- Nearly 5 million working days were lost through bad backs in 2003/04. On average each sufferer took about 20 days off in that 12 month period
- At least 5 million adults consult their GP annually about back pain
- NHS physiotherapy costs are estimated at £150.6 million
- Back pain is the nation's leading cause of disability, with 1.1 million people disabled by it
- One in eight unemployed people say that back pain is the reason they're not working

How is it caused?



There are lots of ways to harm your back.

- Repetitive or heavy lifting
- Bending and twisting
- Exerting too much force
- Poor working conditions
- High job demands and lack of control
- Not recognising symptoms and taking action

What can I do about it?

“Avoiding activity can lead to a much longer recovery time.”

Don't stay in bed! Avoiding activity can lead to a much longer recovery time and possibly long-term back problems.

If possible, continue with your normal day-to-day activities, using simple pain relief if needed. Sometimes manipulative treatment can help.

Try and get back to work – a gradual return with modified tasks will help recovery. The longer someone is off work with back pain the less likely they are to ever return.

Handling aids

They come in all shapes and sizes and there's one to suit practically every need.

Hospitals use beds with adjustable heights, cleaners sometimes have mop buckets on wheels and some people use chair lifts at home. They're all handling aids and they're all there to help reduce injuries.

When choosing a handling aid, don't forget to...

- Consult employees and safety representatives
- Get advice from suppliers/hirers
- Ask if you can use the equipment on a trial basis
- Check equipment is CE-marked
- Ask suppliers about other customers so you can see it in use



Top tips for individuals

- Get involved – work with your employer
- Raise concerns – talk to your employer
- Suggest improvements
- Use the equipment provided
- Keep fit
- Don't ignore early MSD symptoms

Remember...

Think before you lift

- Consider using a handling aid
- Resist stooping or squatting, it's better to slightly bend your back, hips and knees. Adopt a stable position
- Get a good hold. Hug the load, ideally with the heaviest side of the load next to your body
- Avoid twisting the back or leaning sideways, especially when your back is bent
- Look ahead. Once the load is held securely, don't look down at it. If you need to adjust the load, put it down first



Top tips for employers

- Keep it simple – choose sensible solutions
- Prioritise – sort out high-risk operations first
- Assess the risk – the MAC (Manual Handling Assessment Chart) can help (see 'Further information')
- Involve your workers in choosing the right handling aids
- Train users to operate and maintain the equipment safely
- Remember that healthy backs mean healthy workers mean healthy business!

Finally, here's a list of simple do's and don'ts that will help you deal with back pain and let you get on with your life.

Do's

- Do** stay as active as usual, if possible. But see your doctor if you are worried about the back pain or if the pain persists or suddenly gets worse.
- Do** take simple pain relief.
- Do** speak to your employer or your safety representative and, if necessary, discuss what can be done to help you stay at work.

Don'ts

- Don't** take to your bed and wait for the pain to go away. The sooner you get back to normal activity the better.
- Don't** worry. Back pain is rarely serious and unnecessary worry delays recovery.
- Don't** avoid activity simply as a way of avoiding the pain – hurt does not always mean harm.

Further information

HSE's website on musculoskeletal disorders:

www.hse.gov.uk/msd

Manual handling assessment charts Leaflet INDG383
HSE Books 2003 (single copy free or priced packs of 10
ISBN 0 7176 2741 1)

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)

Getting to grips with manual handling: A short guide
Leaflet INDG143(rev2) HSE Books 2004 (single copy free
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*Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations
1992 (as amended). Guidance on Regulations L23*
(Third edition) HSE Books 2004 ISBN 0 7176 2823 X

*A pain in your workplace? Ergonomic problems and
solutions* HSG121 HSE Books 1994 ISBN 0 7176 0668 6

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This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory
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