



Act Now on aches and strains at work

Back pain and joint, neck and arm problems are among the commonest causes of work-related ill health. Here is how to prevent them.

Musculoskeletal disorders are injuries and long-term pain in the back, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, legs and feet. They come from lifting, awkward positions, repeated movements and long periods of sitting or standing. In education they affect caretakers, cleaners, kitchen staff, teaching assistants and desk-based staff alike.

511,000

workers in Britain had a work-related musculoskeletal disorder in 2024 to 2025 (HSE).

7.1 million

working days were lost because of them in the same year.

221,000

of those cases mainly affected the back. Another 211,000 affected the upper limbs or neck.

Where it hurts, **and why**

Back

Lifting and carrying, moving furniture and equipment, bending over, helping pupils to move, sitting for too long.

Neck, shoulders, arms and hands

Typing and mouse work, using a laptop on a desk, marking, writing, cleaning and repeated tasks.

Legs and feet

Standing for long periods, kneeling to pupils' height, climbing ladders and walking on hard floors.

What the law **says**

The Manual Handling Regulations 1992 set a clear order: avoid hazardous lifting where possible, assess the risk if it cannot be avoided, and reduce the risk as far as reasonably practicable.

There is no legal weight limit. Weight matters, but so do the task, the person, the load and the surroundings.

Screens and **workstations**

The Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 cover people who use a screen for an hour or more at a time. This includes people working from home.

Employers must assess workstations, build in breaks and changes of activity, and pay for an eye test on request.

Report pain early. Aches, tingling, numbness and stiffness are warnings. Caught early, many problems can be put right.

Six questions to ask about aches and strains

Hazards

THE KEY POINT

Caught early, most aches and strains can be put right. Left alone, they can end careers.

1 Is lifting avoided?

Trolleys, lifts, deliveries to the point of use, and furniture that is easy to move.

2 Is the risk assessed?

For caretakers, cleaners, caterers and staff who move pupils, with the right equipment and people.

3 Is training right for the job?

Safe handling for each role, refreshed regularly.

4 Are workstations assessed?

For anyone using a screen for an hour or more, including at home.

5 Are breaks built in?

Changes of activity, seats for standing jobs and eye tests paid for on request.

6 Is help quick?

Easy ways to report pain early, fast access to physiotherapy and planned returns to work.

If you have an injury

Tell your manager and your safety rep in writing as soon as you notice a problem, and put it in the accident book if it is linked to a task.

Ask for the risk assessment and for changes to the task. If it does not improve, speak to your union. Work-related injury can affect your right to compensation.

Legal and other standards for prevention and control

- Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992
- Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974



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