



Musculoskeletal disorders

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) affect the joints, bones and muscles. They can arise suddenly from traumatic injuries such as fractures, sprains and strains or can come from repeated stress and strain on certain muscles.

MSDs can affect the upper and lower back, neck, shoulders, arms, legs, feet and hands, the disorders can have a profound impact on the human body in various places.

MSDs can limit mobility which will not only affect a person's ability to work, it can also affect their social and personal lives which can then ultimately affect a person's mental wellbeing.

MSDs account for the most widely reported work-related health conditions among workers globally. In Great Britain, 470,000 people suffer from work-related MSDs and a total of 8.9 million working days were lost because of work-related MSDs in 2019-20.

What causes MSDs?

In the workplace, MSDs are often caused by occupational activities such as:

- Lifting heavy loads
- Working with high-force exertion
- Working in unfavourable body postures
- Monotonous repetitive tasks
- Application of vibration
- Physical environmental conditions
- Heavy work demands and pressures.

How to identify potential MSD hazards:

It can be difficult to identify specific hazards that can cause or aggravate conditions, however, there is a useful acronym that most people will be familiar with that is considered when assessing manual handling hazards (which are very closely connected to MSDs) this acronym is:

- **Task** – understanding manual handling tasks (for example, lifting) and ergonomics (for example, maintaining awkward positions)
- **Individual health** – is the individual in a fit state to undertake the task? Consider any pre-existing conditions, rest and recovery times and general good health.
- **Load** – if a load is too heavy for a worker to hold and is carried out repeatedly, it will eventually substantially affect the body. The nature of the load (liquid, solid) should also be considered, including how this may affect its centre of gravity which may make to task more awkward.
- **Environment** – this should be suitable for the worker to carry out their job without risk and should consider factors such as space constraints or variations in work surfaces or floors and environmental factors (such as excessive noise and temperature).

Training and competence also play a big factor in minimising the risk from MSDs, if you have not received the correct manual handling training required for your role this should be brought to the attention of your employer immediately.