

Safety in Manual Handling

Manual handling covers a wide variety of tasks including lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling and carrying.

If any of these tasks are not carried out safely then there is a risk of injury. Nationally more than a third of all reported injuries which result in someone being off work for more than 3 days are caused by manual handling.

Manual handling injuries can occur almost anywhere, when people are at work or at home. Heavy manual labour, awkward postures and previous or existing injury can increase the risk. The impact from manual handling injuries can be significant for the individual, for example their lifestyle, leisure activities, ability to sleep and job prospects can be affected.

Through the early reporting of symptoms, proper treatment and suitable return to work plans, most people recover from their injuries. However, for a few individuals an injury may cause them to take long periods off work and possibly even leave work entirely.

It is impossible to say if one particular load is safe to lift or to set general weight limits for manual handling, although the chart opposite suggests some guideline weights for work where you can pace yourself and you do not need to twist (twisting reduces these figures by 20%).

Things like the following all have an effect on the risk:

- individual capability;
- the nature of the load;
- environmental conditions;
- training;
- work organisation; and
- other factors.

The following information looks at some of the problems you might come across and how these might be overcome.

DON'T FORGET - IF YOU CAN'T MANAGE THE LOAD COMFORTABLY GET HELP



Getting to grips with manual handling

How do I know if there's a risk of injury?

It's a matter of judgement in each case, but there are certain things to look out for, such as people puffing and sweating, excessive fatigue, bad posture, cramped work areas, awkward or heavy loads or a history of back trouble. Operators can often highlight which activities are unpopular, difficult or hard work.

Can you be more definite?

It is difficult to be precise - so many factors vary between jobs, workplaces and people. But the general risk assessment guidelines in the next section should help to identify when a more detailed risk assessment is necessary.

General risk assessment guidelines

There is no such thing as a completely 'safe' manual handling operation. But working within the following guidelines will cut the risk and reduce the need for a more detailed assessment.

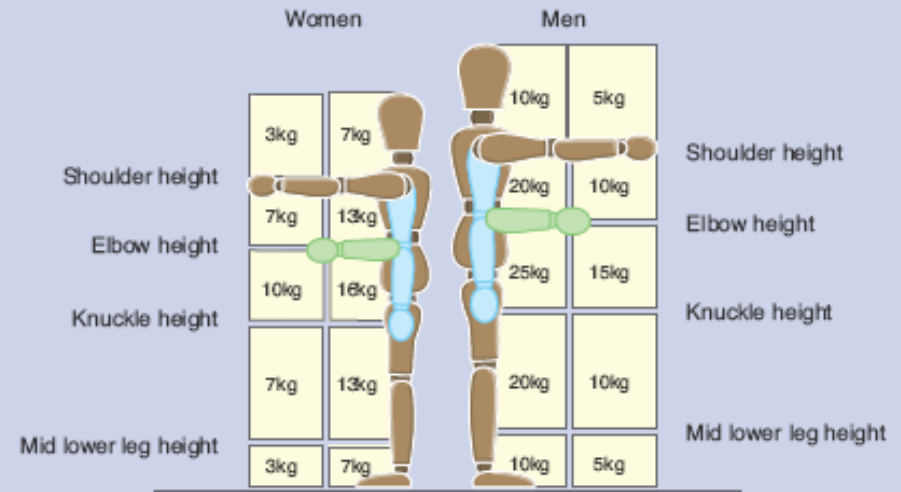


Figure 2 Lifting and lowering

The following features can increase the risk of injury through increasing the strain on your back and upper body and limbs:

<p>The Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • holding loads away from the body • twisting, stooping or reaching upwards? • large vertical movement? • long carrying distances? • strenuous pushing or pulling? • repetitive handling? • insufficient rest or recovery time? • a work rate imposed by a process? <p>Can you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use a lifting aid, e.g. trolley? • choose an area where the layout will make the task easier to do? • reduce the amount of twisting and stooping? • avoid lifting from floor level or above shoulder height, especially heavy loads? • reduce carrying distances - use trolleys, park as close to building entrances as possible? • pace yourself to avoid repetitive handling? • vary the work, allowing one set of muscles to rest while another is used? • push rather than pull? 	<p>The Item to be Moved (Load)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • heavy, bulky or unwieldy? • difficult to grasp - lack of handles? • unstable or likely to move unpredictably - loose contents or items loosely bound together? • harmful, e.g. sharp edges? • awkwardly stacked? • too large for the handler to see over - so you cannot see where you are going? <p>Can the load be made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lighter or less bulky? • easier to grasp? • more stable e.g. re-pack or redistribute contents or separate or secure loosely bound items? • less damaging to hold? 	<p>Location</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • constraints on posture? • bumpy, obstructed or slippery floors? • variations in levels? • hot/cold/humid conditions? • gusts of wind or other strong air movements? • poor lighting conditions? <p>Can you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remove obstructions to free movement - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose a spacious area, • get someone to hold doors open whilst you pass through? • remove trip hazards • avoid damaged, uneven or slippery flooring? • avoid steps and steep ramps? • choose a well-lit area or route? • wear sensible clothing and footwear <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strong pair of shoes with good gripping soles, • full length trousers such as jeans to protect your legs and which do not snag? 	<p>Individual capacity, does the job:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • require unusual capability, e.g. above-average strength or agility? • endanger those with a medical or health condition? • endanger pregnant women? • call for special information or training? <p>You can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoid lifting something if you cannot do it comfortably. • ask as many people to help you as you feel will be needed. • let the person in charge know if you have any limitations on what you can do - e.g. medical condition or pregnancy.
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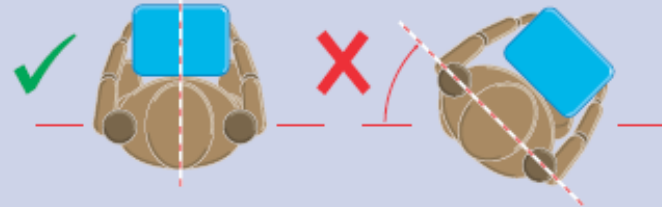
Good handling technique for lifting

Here are some practical tips, suitable for use in training people in safe manual handling. In the following section a basic lifting operation is taken as an example.

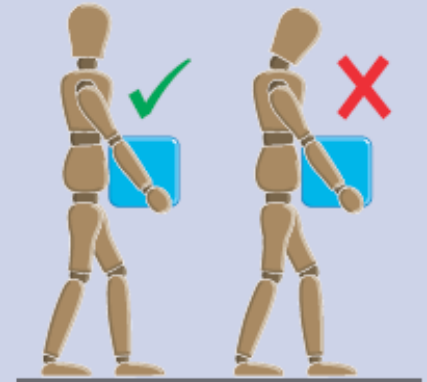
- **Think before lifting/handling.** Plan the lift. Can handling aids be used? Where is the load going to be placed? Will help be needed with the load? Remove obstructions such as discarded wrapping materials. For a long lift, consider resting the load midway on a table or bench to change grip.
- **Keep the load close to the waist.** Keep the load close to the body for as long as possible while lifting. Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the body. If a close approach to the load is not possible, try to slide it towards the body before attempting to lift it.
- **Adopt a stable position.** The feet should be apart with one leg slightly forward to maintain balance (alongside the load, if it is on the ground). The worker should be prepared to move their feet during the lift to maintain their stability. Avoid tight clothing or unsuitable footwear, which may make this difficult.
- **Get a good hold.** Where possible the load should be hugged as close as possible to the body. This may be better than gripping it tightly with hands only.
- **Start in a good posture.** At the start of the lift, slight bending of the back, hips and knees is preferable to fully flexing the back (stooping) or fully flexing the hips and knees (squatting).



- **Don't flex the back any further while lifting.** This can happen if the legs begin to straighten before starting to raise the load.



- **Avoid twisting the back or leaning sideways,** especially while the back is bent. Shoulders should be kept level and facing in the same direction as the hips. Turning by moving the feet is better than twisting and lifting at the same time.
- **Keep the head up when handling.** Look ahead, not down at the load, once it has been held securely.
- **Move smoothly.** The load should not be jerked or snatched as this can make it harder to keep control and can increase the risk of injury.
- **Don't lift or handle more than can be easily managed.** There is a difference between what people can lift and what they can safely lift. If in doubt, seek advice or get help.



- **Put down, then adjust.** If precise positioning of the load is necessary, put it down first, then slide it into the desired position.