

Musculoskeletal health for employees

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Employees are responsible for supporting measures put in place to protect themselves and others. Specific ways employees can maintain good musculoskeletal health (as outlined in MSK Aware CIC) include:

Promote

Know how to protect and promote good musculoskeletal health.
Maintain a good level of fitness and manage weight.

Prevent

Follow the safe working practices/systems of work developed by your employer.
Work together and encourage colleagues to 'do the right thing' to protect and promote musculoskeletal health in the workplace.
Use equipment provided safely and ensure it is in good working order before use.
Report any hazards/concerns to your line manager, including where equipment may be faulty.

Support

Talk to your line manager if you have concerns about manual handling activities/practices.
Discuss any pain or symptoms of MSDs with your line manager/occupational health as soon as possible.
Report incidents where you get pain or suffer an injury when moving and handling on the employer incident reporting system.
Work with your employer/manager to find and implement reasonable adjustments that enable you to stay in work.

Staff experiencing back pain

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Most people will have back pain at some time in their lives. Usually, this is not due to anything serious and settles within a matter of days or weeks. Many people manage the problem themselves without seeing their doctor. For those who are worried about the extent of their problem or whose pain persists and gets worse, a visit to a GP is advisable.

In the past, the accepted response to back pain and some types of MSDs was bed rest or keeping the affected part immobile; however, evidence shows it is much better to keep as 'normally active' as possible. Avoiding movement slows recovery and can lead to long-term pain. The charity BackCare has some advice on its website to help individuals with the self-management of back pain.

There will be instances where certain types of injury will require medical treatment. If you are in any doubt, you should contact your occupational health unit or your GP.

Keeping up to date with the latest training techniques for manual handling and taking the opportunity to participate in refresher training courses is always good practice. There is also a requirement for your manager to release you for any training related to moving and manual handling and to maintain any equipment in safe working order.

Encouraging patients to help themselves wherever possible and when safe for them to do so is better for them, in terms of encouraging their mobility, and you, in terms of lessening the risk of injury.

Individual capability to safely perform manual handling tasks is important. If you cannot perform manoeuvres using the correct postures and movements for example, due to an underlying

condition, an injury, are pregnant or are overweight, this can put you and the patient at risk of injury. A mismatch between physical capability and the demands of the job can lead to increased sickness absence, early ill health retirement and infirmity, if not resolved. Everyone has a responsibility to manage their health and physical fitness.

Maintaining a healthy weight will help you manage back pain and other MSDs, carry out manual handling tasks safely, and make an early recovery from injury.

Improving health and fitness can be done in a variety of ways, from simply finding the time to take a 30-minute brisk walk each day to receiving counselling and support on a troubling personal issue. Your weight and fitness plan should be as individual as yourself; take advantage of schemes on offer from your employer, support from occupational health, colleagues, your line manager, GP, friends and family. More information can be obtained from the National Obesity Forum.

It is important to stress that while you should be supported to lose weight and get fit by your employer if that is what you can and want to do, no one should be bullied or harassed because of a weight issue.