

# Preventing manual handling injuries to catering staff

## HSE information sheet

### Introduction

This information sheet was produced by the Hospitality and Catering Industry Liaison Forum, which has members from trade and professional associations, unions and enforcement authorities. Members' associations are free to reproduce and distribute this guidance to catering establishments. The guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive.

This guidance is aimed at employers of catering staff, but provides useful information for employees and safety representatives. It identifies significant risk areas and offers practical examples of solutions you can apply in your workplace. Further HSE guidance on manual handling and preventing back pain and other upper limb injuries is available on HSE's website. There are also links to tools that will help you assess the risk involved in lifting and repetitive tasks.

Manual handling causes over a third of all workplace injuries. These include work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) such as pain and injuries to arms, legs and joints and repetitive strain injuries of various sorts.

Manual handling covers a wide variety of activities including lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling and carrying. If any of these tasks are not carried out appropriately there is a risk of injury.

Manual handling injuries can have serious implications for both the employer and the person who has been injured. They can occur almost anywhere in the workplace and heavy manual labour, awkward postures and previous or existing injury can increase the risk.

To help prevent manual handling injuries in the workplace, you should avoid such tasks as far as possible. However, where it is not possible to avoid handling a load, employers must look at the risks of that task and put sensible control measures in place

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to prevent and avoid injury, using lifting aids where necessary.

### What the law says

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 require you to avoid any manual handling operations at work which involve a risk to health – so far as reasonably practicable.

If it is not reasonably practicable to avoid any manual handling operations, you must carry out a manual handling risk assessment to identify how the risk is caused, so each factor can be addressed and measures taken to control the risk.

Provision of information, instruction and training to staff are legal requirements.

### Advice for employers

#### Key messages

- You can easily take action to prevent or minimise this type of injury.
- The preventive measures are cost-effective.
- Involving staff is key to success.
- Training staff to use proper lifting techniques and handling aids and raising awareness of the risks will reduce the likelihood of injuries in future.
- Early detection and reporting of aches and pains is crucial.

#### Key messages for employees

- Employees need to take care to protect their own health and safety and that of colleagues by using equipment properly, wearing protective clothing and following safe working practices.
- Cooperate with the employer in complying with their legal duties by following instructions and reporting health and safety issues, such as faulty equipment or worn personal protective equipment (PPE).

### **Where to start (risk assessment)**

You should start by considering the jobs carried out in the kitchen and the staff who work there. Look at the areas of work where there are most likely to be significant risks and prolonged exposure – examples of common risks and suggestions on how to reduce them are provided throughout this information sheet.

This information can form the basis of your risk assessment and you should concentrate on:

- the handling tasks workers are doing;
- the loads they are lifting;
- the environment they are working in;
- the individual capabilities of each worker;
- the positions they need to get in to do the job, eg twisting and stretching;
- the time spent on each task, eg regularity of lifting and break times.

Involve your staff, their representatives and safety representatives in the process, as they will be able to tell you how tasks are actually done and highlight any problem areas and possible solutions. They may also have identified hazards or risks you are not aware of yet.

If you have more than five employees, record the findings of your risk assessment. You can find examples of risk assessments on the HSE website.

If you have fewer than five employees, you don't have to write anything down but it is good practice to keep a record. Keeping a record will act as a future reminder of what you did and why, and will make future reviews easier and quicker.

HSE has produced an assessment guide known as the MAC tool (manual handling assessment chart) to help you identify tasks with significant risks in lifting, carrying and team handling operations: [www.hse.gov.uk/msd/mac](http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/mac). The ART tool (assessing repetitive tasks) has the same function for tasks that could lead to upper limb disorders.

Note that the MAC and ART tools are not appropriate for all manual handling jobs, eg those that involve pushing and pulling.

### **Avoid the risk**

Your first priority should always be to avoid the risks entirely, if reasonably practicable. Examples of ways to avoid risks include:

- reorganising the layout of the kitchen to avoid unnecessary stretching and/or lifting;
- using a dishwashing machine;
- having breaks or using job rotation to minimise the time each individual spends on jobs where there may be a risk.

### **If the risk cannot be avoided**

You can improve workplace conditions. For example:

- replace or repair uneven or slippery floors;
- keep floors dry and free from contamination by cleaning up spills immediately (see CAIS6 *Preventing slips and trips in kitchens and food service*);
- provide trolley ramps at changes in floor level;
- keep all catering equipment well-maintained;
- ensure shelving is not overloaded;
- install automatic doors if staff have to carry things through them frequently.

You can use mechanical aids to make it easier, including:

- four-wheeled trolleys (with adjustable height or lockable castors, if needed);
- large mixer bowls on wheeled dollies;
- sack trucks;
- false bottoms in deep sinks to reduce awkward bending at the waist.

Consider redesigning individual tasks to:

- reduce the amount of twisting, bending, stooping, stretching, pushing and pulling;
- reduce the number of times it is necessary to do the task (but without increasing the load each time);
- store heavy items on shelves at waist height;
- use team-working for tasks such as moving a heavy pot.

Consider making loads easier to handle. For example:

- buy cooking oil in easier-to-handle cardboard boxes with sturdy handles/grips;
- break down trays of A10-size cans before loading onto storage shelving;
- use smaller containers for cleaning chemicals and/or appropriate siphons or pumps to avoid handling bulk containers;

- put heavy equipment such as chest freezers on (lockable) castors to make cleaning routines easier.

You must provide appropriate tools, equipment and protective clothing, based on your risk assessment.

### **Dishwashing**

The risks associated with dishwashing are:

- repeated lifting and handling of full dish racks or heavy dish trays and cutlery buckets;
- repetitive twisting and bending at sinks or leaning over sinks;
- awkward reaching across sinks or work surfaces when manually cleaning dishes;
- grasping dishes by fingertips (pinch grips).

Consider providing:

- dishwashers;
- rollers or conveyors;
- trolleys to move large quantities of dishes;
- cleaning tools with good grips when heavy-duty cleaning is required;
- appropriate gloves and non-slip shoes where required – gloves should fit properly and, if required, have extra grip on palms and fingertips to reduce the gripping force needed to handle greasy dishes;
- foot rails or a step to shift body weight and reduce stress on employees' lower back and legs when standing for long periods.

Train staff to:

- push trays along counters towards the dishwasher rather than lifting;
- not overload dish racks and, if they have to lift them, to use more than one rack to spread the load;
- grip trays at the midpoint when carrying them rather than the front edge, keeping the tray as close to the body as possible, but bearing in mind any risks of contact with hot surfaces.

### **Pot washing**

Most pot washing will be done manually in large deep sinks, although some employers may have automatic pot-washing machines. The risks associated with these tasks are:

- lifting heavy pots;
- awkward bending and twisting when leaning over sinks for long periods;
- repetitive wrist and shoulder movements when scrubbing pots;
- repetitive reaching into pots;
- forceful arm exertions when scrubbing pots.

Consider providing:

- pot-washing dishwashers if appropriate;
- false bottoms in deep sinks to reduce awkward bending at the waist;
- water jet sprays.

When washing, train staff to:

- rest their free arm on the surface of the pot to reduce the gripping force needed to hold it securely;
- place their free hand on the side of a soup kettle to support the upper body and reduce stress on the lower back;
- keep items close to the body;
- move large diameter pots as close as possible to the front of the sink and rotate them during washing to avoid reaching across the pot.

When lifting and carrying, train staff to:

- assess the weight of a pot before lifting it;
- keep pots close to the body when lifting and bend the knees rather than the back;
- point toes in the direction they are reaching to avoid twisting.

### **Food preparation**

The risks may include all or some of the following:

- repetitive motion of the hands, wrists and shoulders;
- forceful lifting or carrying of heavy bowls or pots;
- awkward bending and twisting of the back;
- awkward reaching.

### **Chopping and cutting**

- Provide knives that are in good condition and kept sharp to reduce the force required by the user.

You can also consider providing:

- utensils and knives with ergonomic handles designed for comfort and those that allow for power grips;
- chopping machines for vegetables to reduce manual chopping or buy in pre-prepared vegetables;
- workbenches of different heights.

### **Mixers**

- Make sure large mixers are placed at a height that allows access to the mixing bowl handles between knuckle and elbow height. This will reduce bending at the waist.
- If a mixer is on a raised platform, ensure that the platform is fixed firmly to the floor and can handle the weight of the mixer.
- Where appropriate, provide dollies with handles for transporting heavy bowls around the kitchen. If required, two workers should lift and lower the bowl together, each holding the handle on one side.

### **Ovens and steamers**

- Ovens with side-hinged doors rather than bottom-hinged doors allow easier access to items in the oven.
- Using oven racks between waist and elbow height to minimise awkward posture.

### **Soup kettles and heavy pots**

- Large soup kettles with extended handles make it easier to tip the kettle when pouring soup into smaller containers.

### **Storage areas**

Risks associated with storage are:

- forceful lifting of heavy items;
- repetitive and awkward reaching or bending to either higher or lower shelves.

You can reduce the risks in a number of ways.

For example consider:

- having storage areas that are as close to the working area as possible to reduce carrying distances;
- supplying localised food storage, eg installing

chilled storage under working surfaces;

- buying bulk goods in smaller, easier-to-handle containers;
- improving the height and situation of shelving or racks;
- labelling areas to make it easy to locate items;
- storing items appropriately depending on their weight, size and frequency of use, eg frequently used, heavier items within easy reach, and between knuckle and elbow height (see *Manual handling at work: A brief guide*);
- keeping storage areas clear and free from obstructions;
- providing sufficient space in storage areas to allow the use of mechanical aids;
- using adjustable-height handling aids during shelf stacking and stocktaking.

### **Cleaning**

Risks associated with these tasks are:

- forceful exertions;
- awkward shoulder or back postures;
- cuts, bruises, pressure injuries and sore skin.

Consider providing:

- long-handled brushes where reaching is required;
- cleaning tools that have soft rubber-like handles to reduce gripping force;
- a platform of adequate size to minimise excessive reaching.

### **Removing waste**

Waste removal will involve lifting heavy rubbish bags, which carries the risk of forceful exertion. To minimise the risk:

- provide smaller refuse bags;
- put up signs near bins to remind staff not to overfill them.

### **Thermal comfort**

#### **Heat and humidity**

High temperatures and humidity can affect the health and comfort of kitchen staff and contribute to heat stress. You can reduce the risks by:

- providing good ventilation systems and maintaining air quality by regular cleaning and

maintenance of cooker hoods and fume extraction/ventilation systems;

- installing air conditioning, or using fans to increase airflow;
- educating workers on the symptoms of heat stress;
- providing cool water for employees and instructing them to drink small amounts frequently during and after work;
- providing adequate rest breaks;
- ensuring employees' clothing and footwear is suitable for working in a kitchen environment.

### **Working in the cold**

Kitchen workers may be exposed to cold if they store or retrieve food supplies from large walk-in freezers. Cold temperatures can increase the risk of muscle strain and loss of manual dexterity. Reduce the risks by providing:

- protective clothing, such as thermal gloves and jackets where appropriate;
- sufficient and suitable breaks to regain warmth.

Further information on thermal comfort and heat stress can be found on HSE's temperature webpages ([www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm)) and in *Heat stress in the workplace*.

### **Individual capability**

You should consider an individual's physical capability to do a particular task, paying attention to:

- the age and size of an individual;
- the pace and intensity of the work – if the pace is too high, this can increase the risk of injury through fatigue and can be stressful for that individual;
- those who have existing health issues or a physical weakness;
- pregnant workers, who have increased risks of postural problems, limitations of ability, fatigue and heat stress – additional information on risk assessment for new and expectant mothers can be found on the HSE website ([www.hse.gov.uk/mothers/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/mothers/index.htm)).

### **Training**

Everyone who works for you needs to know how to work safely and without risks to health. You must

provide clear instructions, information and adequate training for your employees on:

- the risks they may face;
- the measures in place to control the risks;
- how to follow any emergency procedures.

It is particularly important to consider the training needs and supervision of:

- new recruits and trainees;
- young people who are particularly vulnerable to accidents;
- people changing jobs or taking on new responsibilities.

Training should take account of:

- the risks associated with manual handling and repetitive tasks involving twisting and stretching, and how injuries can occur;
- correct use of any lifting aids or other equipment;
- safe lifting and handling techniques (see the HSE leaflet *Manual handling at work: A brief guide*);
- reporting procedures and early detection of symptoms.

Remember to check that staff whose first language is not English have understood the training and information. This may mean using signs, other visual information, translation or interpretation.

### **Further reading**

*Assessment of repetitive tasks of the upper limbs: (the ART tool)* Leaflet INDG438 HSE 2010  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg438.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg438.htm)

*Heat stress in the workplace: A brief guide* INDG451(rev1) HSE 2013  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg451.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg451.htm)

*Manual handling assessment charts: (the MAC tool)* Leaflet INDG383(rev2) HSE 2014  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg383.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg383.htm)

*Manual handling at work: A brief guide* INDG143(rev3) HSE 2012  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg143.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg143.htm)

*Preventing slips and trips in kitchens and food service* Catering Information Sheet CAIS6(rev3) HSE 2017  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/cais6.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/cais6.htm)

## Further information

HSE's website provides information, as well as a number of free leaflets and information sheets, that will be useful to help manage risks and comply with legal requirements, particularly *Health and safety made simple: The basics for your business* ([www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/index.htm)) and the catering and hospitality webpages ([www.hse.gov.uk/catering/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/catering/index.htm)).

See also [www.hse.gov.uk/msd/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/index.htm), [www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies](http://www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies) and [www.hse.gov.uk/temperature](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature).

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk). You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

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