

Hand-arm vibration

A guide for employees



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Introduction

This pocket card is aimed at people who use handheld powered work equipment or workpieces which vibrate while being processed by powered machinery, such as pedestal grinders.

What is hand-arm vibration?

Hand-arm vibration is vibration transmitted into your hands and arms when you use this equipment. It can cause hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) and carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS).

What is hand-arm vibration syndrome?

HAVS:

- affects the nerves, blood vessels, muscles and joints of the hand, wrist and arm;
- can become severely disabling if ignored;
- includes vibration white finger, which can cause severe pain in the affected fingers.

What is carpal tunnel syndrome?

Carpal tunnel syndrome is a nerve disorder which may involve pain, tingling, numbness and weakness in parts of the hand and can be caused by, among other things, exposure to vibration.

How can I help reduce the risks?

It is your employer's responsibility to protect you against HAVS and CTS, but you should help by asking your employer if your job could be done in a different way without using vibrating tools and machines. If this cannot happen:

- ask to use suitable low vibration tools;
- always use the right tool for each job (to do the job more quickly and expose you to less hand-arm vibration);
- check tools before using them to make sure they have been properly maintained and repaired to avoid increased vibration caused by faults or general wear;
- make sure cutting tools are kept sharp so that they remain efficient;
- reduce the amount of time you use a tool in one go, by doing other jobs in between;

- avoid gripping or forcing a tool or workpiece more than you have to;
- store tools so that they do not have very cold handles when next used;
- encourage good blood circulation by:
 - keeping warm and dry, eg wear warm waterproof clothing;
 - giving up or cutting down on smoking because smoking reduces blood flow; and
 - massaging and exercising your fingers during work breaks;
- report any problems with your hands promptly to your employer or the person who does your health checks;
- use any control measures your employer has put in place to reduce the risk of HAVS;
- ask your trade union safety representative or employee representative for advice.

Further information

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, visit 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.

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory, unless specifically stated, and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance.

This pocket card is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg296.htm.

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