



# Occupational Safety & Health Newsletter



NHSF, Workplace Health & Wellbeing Unit, HR, Issue 21

## European Safety Campaign 2020-2022 Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load

The **Healthy Workplaces Lighten the Load** campaign focuses on work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). As part of European Safety Week: 19<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> October, the HSE National Health and Safety Function are promoting awareness of MSDs and preventative measures.

MSDs affect the locomotor system; that is, muscles, bones, joints and associated tissues such as tendons and ligaments. Symptoms may include pain, discomfort, numbness and tingling in the affected area and can differ in severity from mild and periodic to severe, chronic and debilitating conditions.



Healthy Workplaces Campaign 2020-22  
**LIGHTEN THE LOAD**

Prevention and management of work-related musculoskeletal disorders



Approximately 60% of workers in Ireland have muscular pain in their neck, shoulders and upper limbs. Ref: [Arthritis Ireland/Fit for Work Ireland](#). Physical, organisational, psychosocial and individual factors at work can contribute to their development. MSDs can be highly detrimental to an individual's quality of life and ability to work and are one of the most common causes of disability, sick leave and early retirement. This newsletter focuses on work-related musculoskeletal disorders; their prevention and management.

## Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders in the HSE

The HSEs [Manual Handling and People Handling Policy](#) aims to reduce the risks associated with manual handling and people handling activities. Manual and people handling risk assessments and the provision of controls are key components of managing the risks associated with such tasks/practices. There are **four risk assessment templates** that can be completed for different work tasks or practices:

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- **Overall Generic Unit/Department Risk Assessments:** an assessment of the general situation in the ward or department and takes account of the work environment and activities.
- **Task Specific Risk Assessment:** Where a manual handling activity presents a risk of injury, the activity must be assessed in greater detail to determine what controls are required.
- **People Handling Risk Assessment:** Assists to clarify safe methods of handling each service user and develop a handling care plan in order to prevent injury.
- **Dynamic Risk Assessment:** This is an informal on-the-spot undocumented risk assessment to be completed prior to a manual or people handling task. The purpose of this risk assessment is to allow the employee to identify if the task is within their capability.

Manual Handling Training must form part of the overall strategy to reduce the risks associated with such activities. Information on manual handling training is available at <https://www.hse.ie/safetyandwellbeing/>

## Work-related upper limb disorders in Irish Healthcare

Work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDs) are a type of work related musculoskeletal disorder that affect the neck, shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists, fingers and thumbs.

IOSH and UCC published a study called [Hands on](#) to investigate the occurrence and measures of prevention of WRULDs in hand-intensive healthcare occupations.



These occupations included chartered physiotherapists, physical therapists and sports/athletic therapists.

Hand-intensive tasks (e.g. precision hand and wrist movements, repetitive hand motions and sustained awkward postures) increase the risk of WRULDs. WRULDs can be caused by a single event (an accident), a build-up over time or the aggravation of a pre-existing condition through work.

The study showed that:

- 76% of therapists employed in public and private practice reported at least one upper limb symptom

in the past year

- 38% of hospital-based therapists experienced incapacitating symptoms in the past 12 months
- The majority of study participants reported that they did not have a completed risk assessment for their work.

Points to consider to prevent upper limb disorders:

- Complete warm up and stretch exercises before performing manual techniques
- Select techniques that will not aggravate or provoke discomfort
- Modify patient/client position where possible
- Adjust plinth or bed height before treating a patient/client and modify own position
- Pause regularly, enabling stretching and change of position

**Risk assessment approach to prevention:** In the HSE, managers are responsible in consultation with employees to ensure that risk assessments are completed and appropriate control measures implemented. In more complex circumstances, it may be necessary to engage the services of an Ergonomist. Contact the [Health and Safety Helpdesk](#) for ergonomic service details.

## Rehabilitation in the HSE

Rehabilitation is the process of restoration of skills, for a person who has had an illness or injury so as to regain maximum self-sufficiency and function in a normal or as near normal manner as possible. Being at work is beneficial for us as it helps build confidence and self-esteem, and rewards us financially. Socially it can help us build contacts and friendships. There are also economic benefits for the employer, by reducing sickness absence and retention of skilled workers.



A [Rehabilitation of Employees Back to Work after Illness or Injury Policy & Procedure](#) has been developed to enable staff to stay at work or support them to return to work following injury or illness. Engagement in this process has real value for the staff and management and should be viewed as a positive collaborative process. Occupational Health services works with staff and management through a [rehabilitation process](#) in order to reach the best outcome by providing recommendations on reasonable accommodation based on the ability of the staff member and demands of the job.

## Neck and shoulder pains from use of Display Screen Equipment

If your job involves a lot of time sitting in front of the computer screen and if you notice that at work you have started to get aches and pains in your neck and shoulders. **What should you do?**

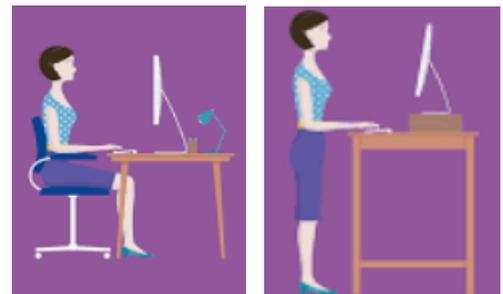


- Firstly, complete the [Display Screen Equipment: User Awareness](#) training module on HSEland. This module has been designed to show you how to set our workstation up safely. You must adjust your workstation by adjusting your chair, desk, screen height, monitor distance, keyboard and mouse placement
- With your DSE Assessor, the [Display Screen Equipment Risk Assessment](#) must be completed. A DSE Assessor can be your line manager or a designee who has completed the required training on [HSEland](#)
- The risk assessment should be used to highlight additional requirements based on the awareness training and an implementation plan agreed
- If your problems persist then discuss this with your manager where you can be referred to Occupational Health for a medical review
- It is really important to introduce periods where you “*Get up and Move*”. Try gentle stretching exercises during online meetings, introduce periods of movement or stand up during phone calls. Check out further guidance at [Display Screen Equipment \(DSE\) Campaign](#).

## Workplace interventions to decrease MSDs

Research has shown that musculoskeletal symptoms in sedentary workers may be caused by;

- spinal loading associated with sustained sitting/standing
- increased activation of spinal muscles in specific sitting postures
- lack of variation in movement
- prolonged keyboard and mouse use
- high mental workload and
- stress.



A [Cochrane systematic review in 2019](#) investigated the published literature for evidence for the effectiveness of workplace interventions for decreasing MSDs in sedentary workers. The researchers found only 10 eligible randomised controlled trials. There were no eligible studies on organisational interventions.

The research found **insufficient evidence** that

- sit-stand desk or treadmill workstations are effective in reducing intensity of low back and upper back symptoms
- activity trackers reduce the intensity of back, neck, shoulder and elbow/wrist/hand symptoms in the short term.

For sedentary workers the DSE user awareness training and DSE risk assessment are essential. Take a *Get up and Move* approach for your safety. For more information, see the [DSE Campaign](#).



# What's New



## COVID-19 Updates:

### Lead Worker Representative Training:

In line with the Government's Return to Work Safely Protocol the National Health and Safety Function has developed specific training for HSE Lead Worker Representatives (LWR). The training material is now available on the [HSE LanD](#).



**COVID-19 Guidance:** For COVID-19 and Return to Work Safely guidance and forms, go to [Managing employees return to work safely - working arrangements for COVID-19](#).

**Risk Assessment Review:** Managers must ensure that risk assessments are reviewed in line with COVID-19 guidance and requirements. Risk assessments must be specific for the task being completed. For example where a task specifies the need for staff to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) then the risk assessment must detail what type should be used (e.g. FFP2 respirator), where it is issued and if fit testing/training is required in its use. Queries in relation to fit testing should be referred to Des Pearson, National H&S Manager at [des.pearson@hse.ie](mailto:des.pearson@hse.ie).

## Revised H&S Documentation

All risk assessment forms and guidance have been revised in the context of COVID-19.

The following policies have also been revised in the context of COVID-19.:

[The Management of Health and Safety in Contract Work: Co-operation and Coordination with Contractors and Others 2018](#)

[Manual Handling and People Handling Policy, 2018.](#)

Please go to <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/safetywellbeing/> for all H&S Documentation

## First Aid Responders: COVID-19 Supplemental Training

In order to comply with the HSE Return to Work protocol, National Health and Safety Function are now offering a **1 hour on line** course "COVID specific Protocol for Responders" to update First Aid Responders.

First Aid Responders will require access to a PC/laptop with sound and internet access to complete this training.

If you are a First Aid Responder and require this training please email [maryj.cotter@hse.ie](mailto:maryj.cotter@hse.ie) and we can arrange a date and time for the training.

## Chemical Agents Code of Practice 2020 by the HSA

The 2020 Code of Practice replaces the 2018 Code of Practice for the Chemical Agents Regulations. The 2020 Code of Practice supports both the Chemical Agents and Carcinogens Regulations. Available from: [HSA](#)

