

# Don't make work a pain ...

The way we work – for example how we move our body or parts of our body, how we sit, how we lift things and even how we stress – can cause problems with our bones, joints, tendons, ligaments, muscles and nerves. Problems can range from slight aches and pains to more serious conditions that need treatment and can impact on your quality of life. Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) is the umbrella term given for these particular problems and back pain is one of the most common MSDs.

This fact sheet gives you information to help you be more MSD aware and highlights simple steps that you can take to reduce your risk.

## Risky business

All workers are at risk of MSDs and you are more at risk if your work involves:

- **repetitive movements** (especially rapid movements) where the same joints and muscles are being used for big chunks of your day
- **using force** to carry, lift, push, pull, hold, put down or move heavy or awkward loads
- **staying in fixed** (like sitting or standing) or **awkward** positions for long periods of time.

## Work well steps

Reduce your risk of developing an MSD by taking these simple steps to being more MSD aware.

- **Adjust your work station** to suit your needs – arrange the height, position and layout so that you are comfortable and can make full use of equipment provided.
- **Lift correctly and push and pull properly.** When lifting bend your knees not your back and keep the load as close to your body as possible. Whenever possible use lifting and handling devices.
- **Avoid staying in the same position**, like sitting at a desk or driving, for big chunks of time. Make sure you change your posture, shift, stand up, walk around and stretch. Don't slouch! This will help avoid stiff muscles and relieve muscle tension.
- If your work is **repetitive** or **intensive** it is doubly important to **take a break** or change your activity. Give your muscles a

breather and exercise another set to keep your body in balance. Short frequent breaks are better than longer less frequent ones.

- Prolonged or excessive stress can trigger MSDs, in particular back pain, so you need to **tackle stress before it physically tackles you**. Speak to your boss about positive ways to deal with stress at work. You can also try this quick fix relaxation technique. Take a long slow breath in, hold for 3 seconds then very slowly breathe out. Really concentrate on your breathing. Repeat this as often as you need to – you should begin to feel more calm and relaxed.

## MSD Symptoms

Not all MSDs can be prevented so tackling symptoms quickly, before they get worse is important.

Symptoms to watch out for include aches, pains, numbness, tingling, swollen joints and restricted movements. Listen to your body – if you are putting off certain tasks because of pain or changing your position to dodge pain you need to take action.

## Dealing with MSDs

There are key things that you can do yourself to deal with symptoms if they strike. Remember dealing with symptoms straight away, however mild or minor you think they are, is important.

When you get pain it is easy to seize up and feel like you shouldn't move a muscle. But this is the worst thing you can do as it can actually make the problem worse and

recovery longer. So if you are experiencing lower back pain for example, **try to stay as active as possible** – however with some MSDs you may need to speak to your doctor to ensure that you won't aggravate the problem.

## MSD Action plan

- Stay active
- Take anti-inflammatories\*
- Speak to your boss
- Get advice from your occupational health department

\* Anti-inflammatories should not be taken if you have asthma, a bleeding disorder, are on warfarin or if you are pregnant.

## Talk about MSDs

Talk to your employer about finding solutions when it comes to reducing MSD risks and ways to improve your working environment. You can also ask your employer for a risk assessment which will help identify significant risks and avoid potential problems.

## More information and advice

**Health and Safety Executive** Call the HSE Infoline on 0845 345 00 55 or visit [www.hse.gov.uk/msd](http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd)

**BackCare** Visit [www.backcare.org.uk](http://www.backcare.org.uk) or call the Helpline on 0845 130 2704