

# What is manual handling?

Manual handling means using your body to exert force to handle, support or restrain any object, including people or animals.

Manual handling is not limited to handling heavy objects and covers a wide range of activities including lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, lowering, throwing and carrying. It includes repetitive tasks such as packing, typing, cleaning and using hand-tools, operating machinery and equipment.



## What is a musculoskeletal injury?

Musculoskeletal injury is a term used to describe a range of conditions which are injuries to the body's musculoskeletal system- our bones, muscles, ligaments and tendons, as well as the soft tissue that connect all these together.

## What kinds of injuries can result from manual handling?

Unsafe manual handling may cause a variety of musculoskeletal injuries which include back pain, muscle strains, ligament sprains, other soft tissue injuries, fractures and dislocations, abdominal hernias, carpal tunnel syndrome and tendinitis.

## How can physiotherapy help?

Physiotherapists are experts in human movement. They understand how your muscles, bones, joints and ligaments work and how injuries occur. Australian physiotherapists are leading world research in this field which helps our physiotherapists to give you excellent preventative programs and treatment.

They can:

- Assess your muscle strength and fitness to design an

appropriate fitness program.

- Teach you how to better handle loads.
- Show you how to prevent injury in your home or workplace.
- Treat muscle, joint and ligament injuries to assist with a speedy recovery.

## Why fitness helps:

Your physical condition is important. For example, stiff joints and muscles can reduce your ability to keep your back in a safe position as you lift. If your leg muscles are not very strong, you may find it harder to lift effectively. Poor fitness will cause your muscles to tire, placing more stress on the spine and other joints. A physiotherapist can advise you on the best way to improve your fitness.

## How can lifting injure your back?

- Twisting or jerking while lifting and carrying can injure the small facet joints which guide movement of the back. The discs and the ligaments are also at risk. Discs are composed of a jelly-like core, surrounded by a strong fibrous ring. With repeated unsafe lifting, the fibrous ring or its supporting ligaments may tear or rupture.
- Back injuries are most likely to occur when the spine is

bent forward and twisted at the same time.

## How to lift safely:

- Get your body as close as possible to the object to be lifted
- Position your feet at least shoulder width apart for stability
- Keeping your back straight, bend your knees and squat down to the floor. Get a good grasp on the load with both hands
- Keep the load close to your body to minimise the stress on the low back. Use your leg muscles to stand up lifting the load off the floor
- Do not twist your body when moving the load. Instead change direction by turning your feet and taking small steps until you are in the correct position

## Lifting Tips

- Reduce the need to lift objects by locating and storing objects at waist height.
- Never lift anything that is too heavy. Use your safety sense- If the load is too heavy, awkward or too hard to reach- get help! and store objects at waist height.

- Always ask for assistance with lifting wherever possible
- Try to minimise the distance and the period of time you are lifting or carrying the object
- Use appropriate tools to help with lifting and transporting heavy objects (e.g. trolleys etc.)
- Where possible, try to reduce the weight of the object being lifted or carried so that you can perform several smaller safe lifts, rather than one heavy unsafe lift
- Never lift any object that causes pain
- Let your legs do the work

### Common lifting problems

- Lifting with back bent and legs straight
- Holding load too far from body- the further the load is away from your body the greater the force placed on your muscles in order to keep your body balanced.
- Twisting while lifting or carrying, particularly during manual handling in cluttered areas
- Poor coordination between two or more people during the lift.
- Losing your balance whilst lifting because the load is too heavy, feet are too close together or the load is uneven or unstable.

### Specific Advice:

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2. ....
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## Helpful Hints

