

Manual Handling



Manual handling risks are the most common injuries in construction, with 1 in 4 workers receiving a back injury of some description in any year. ACC claims for lifting, carrying, and strain injuries number over 50,000 a year.

Awareness of hazards:

Musculoskeletal hazards are lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, holding, or restraining as a part of work. Features of the environment, human behaviours, and choices are also contributing factors. Physical tasks are often dangerous when they are rushed, when workers can slip or trip, or when a worker is physically or mentally unwell.

Understanding risks:

A key contributor to a lifting injury is often rushing the task. Poor systems of work can cause immediate soft tissue injuries to muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Muscle tears and hernias may require surgery. Injuries to the spine can be permanent.

Eliminate or minimise risks (examples):

Risk controls focus on either the hazard or the behaviour of workers and others.

- **Eliminate the hazard.** Clear access. Remove waste, falling, trip, and slip hazards.
- **Substitute the hazard.** Mobile Elevated Work Platforms (MEWPs).
- **Isolate the hazard.** Zoned work areas
- **Use engineered modifications.** Trolleys, hoists, GIB lifters.

Focusing on human behaviours include:

- **Administration** of safe systems of work. Safe work practices and planning to avoid time pressures. Cleaning, housekeeping, regular breaks, hydration, health monitoring.
- **Personal protection equipment (PPE).** Gloves and boots to avoid slipping.

Bad work habits accumulate over time to create chronic and painful conditions. These are often called repetitive strain, occupational overuse, or gradual process (illnesses).

Injuries can occur when loads are too heavy, hard to grasp, slippery, or too bulky. Bending, overreaching, or twisting while lifting weights increases the risks of injury. A good lifting technique keeps the weight close to the body, does not stress the back, and is driven through the legs.

Safe worker behaviours include being mentally and physically fit for work, pausing to plan a lifting task, using lifting aids, and sharing loads.

Unsafe behaviours include poor 'housekeeping', not taking regular breaks, and poor diet and hydration.