

Manual Handling

Manual handling is carried out in most types of work. It includes activities that require someone to exert force in order to move (lift, lower, push, pull), carry, hold, grasp, manipulate, strike, throw or restrain an object, load or body part. Manual handling can contribute to injuries affecting all parts of the body, particularly the back, shoulder and wrist. Today, forklifts, hoists, dollies and other types of lifting equipment are used to lift heavy objects. However, sometimes it is necessary to load or unload moderate to heavy objects by hand. When that is the case, knowing the proper ways to lift can save you a great deal of pain and misery from a back injury.

- Assess the situation

Before lifting or carrying a heavy object, ask yourself the following questions:

- Can you lift this load safely, or is it a two-person lift. Two persons lift are when the item is 20KG or more.
- How far will you have to carry the load
- Is the path clear of clutter, cords, slippery areas, overhangs, stairs, curbs, or uneven surfaces
- Will you encounter closed doors that need to be opened
- Once the load is lifted, will it block your view
- Can the load be broken down into smaller parts
- Should you wear gloves to get a better grip and protect your hands

- Size up the load

- Test the weight by lifting one of the corners. If it is too heavy or an awkward shape, stop
- If there is any doubt, ask for help from fellow workers
- Try to use a mechanical lift or a hand truck
- Try to break the load down into smaller parts

- Use good lifting techniques

- Get close to the load. Centre yourself over the load and stand with your feet shoulder width apart
- Tighten your stomach muscles. Tight abdominal muscles increase intra-abdominal pressure and help to support the back
- Get a good handhold and pull the load close to you. The farther the load is from your body, the heavier it will feel
- Bend your knees. Bending your knees is the single most important thing you can do when you lift moderate to heavy objects. Squat down like a weightlifter, bend your knees, keep your back in its natural arch and let your legs do the lifting. Your leg muscles are much more powerful than the smaller muscles in your back
- Do not jerk. Use a smooth motion and lift straight up
- Do not twist or turn your body while lifting. Keep your head up and look straight ahead
- Hold the load close and keep it steady

- Carrying the load

- Change direction by turning your feet, not your back
- Your nose and your toes should always be pointing in the same direction. Any sudden twisting can result in injuring your back
- Rest if you are fatigued. Set the load down and rest for a few minutes

- Setting the load down
 - Bend your knees. Squat down and let your legs do the work
 - Keep your back curves. Remember do not twist your body while setting down a load, and keep your head up
 - Keep the load close
 - Plan your release. Once the load is where you want it, release your grip. Never release our grip until the load is secure

- Using trolleys and lifting aids
 - Push rather than pull. It is easier and safer to push than to pull. You can use your body weight to assist when pushing
 - Keep close to the load and lock your arms. Try not to lean over and keep your back in its natural arches
 - Use both hands. Carts are easier to push and control using both hands
 - Use tie-downs if necessary to secure the load

- Forklifts
 - Use a forklift to lift and transport very heavy objects
 - Obtain training and authorization before using a forklift

Remember: manual handling can contribute to injuries affecting all parts of the body, please ensure that you follow the above 7 techniques when you are required to lift/move/carry a heavy load or object

