

## Lifting and Shifting

Your body can cope with many daily stresses and strains, however, there are things you and your employer can do to prevent these resulting in back problems. Probably the most important thing is to do a risk assessment to identify which activities in which situations could lead to injury.

Such a risk assessment should look at:

- Defining the task – e.g. does it involve holding loads at a distance, unsatisfactory body movements such as twisting, risk of sudden movement of the load?
- Defining the load – e.g. is it heavy, bulky, difficult to grasp?
- The working environment – e.g. are there space constraints, uneven or unsafe floors, extremes of temperature?
- The individual – e.g. does the individual require unusual strength, special information or training, to complete the task?
- Any other factors that may have an impact on the situation – e.g. protective equipment or clothing that may hinder movement or posture

A risk assessment should make people aware of the risks involved and find ways of reducing these risks. This may include:

- Adjusting the task – e.g. by using manual handling equipment, asking for help in moving heavy goods
- Using aids and equipment – make sure you have received proper training and know how to use the equipment correctly. Ensure the equipment is easily available in the area where you need it and that all equipment is regularly maintained and checked
- Adjust the load – can you make the load lighter or easier to manage or grasp?
- Altering the working environment – can the work environment be made less constrained, easier to navigate?
- Your capability – is there any training you can do to make your tasks easier and safer?

One of the most common causes of back pain in a manual labour setting is as a result of lifting and carrying objects. Observing the correct procedure when doing these tasks can significantly reduce the risk. Here are some tips:

- Mind your back – before attempting to move anything stop and think. Be aware of your back and your posture as well as the load and the distance you will be carrying it. Thinking about these things will allow you to determine whether you can manage the load yourself or if you will need assistance
- Adopt a stable position – have your feet hip width apart with one foot slightly forward to maintain balance
- Bend your knees – bend at your knees to get down to the level of the load. Avoid placing a knee on the floor as it may make you less stable
- Ensure a good hold on the load – try to grasp the load at the top and bottom depending on its shape, curving your fingers around it
- Be smooth – lift the load smoothly off the ground keeping it close to your body and remembering to breath
- Carry on moving – walk steadily with the load close to your body. When you get to your destination avoid twisting to place your load down
- Put it down – place your feet hip width apart and bend your knees to lower the load.
- Be careful not to trap your fingers
- Find alternatives – for example if you have a cylindrical load such as a barrel it may be much easier to tilt it and roll it to its destination
- Reduce risks – if you cannot manage a load alone do not attempt to carry it. Get help from another employee or use a piece of equipment