



Taking Care of Bones and Joints

Introduction

Back pain and other musculoskeletal aches and pains are the single biggest cause of sickness absence in the UK, costing the economy approximately £7.4 billion per annum and the NHS around £150 million pounds in physiotherapy treatment.

Every week around 50 percent of people of working age will experience a musculoskeletal disorder, also known as an upper limb disorder (ULD). These conditions include, for example, a 'frozen' shoulder, back pain or tendon-related pain.

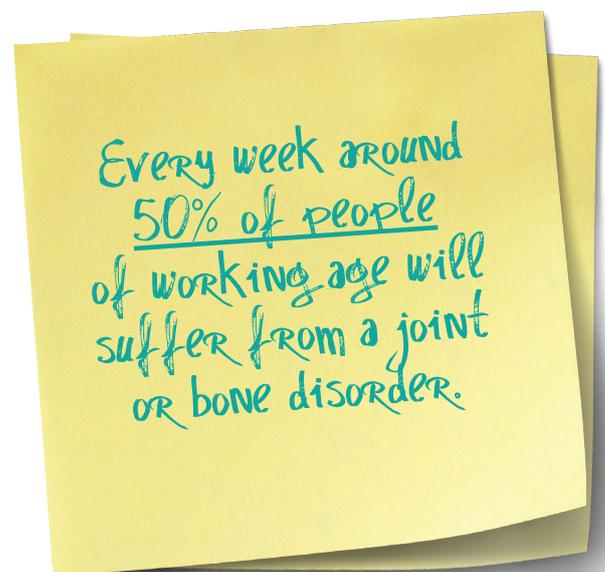
Factory workers are more at risk than managers of suffering an upper limb disorder called Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) known to affect 370,000 workers in the UK with 86,000 new cases recorded in 2008. This costs employers around £300 million in lost working time, sick pay and administration.

Why Encourage Taking Care of Bones and Joints at Work?

As well as the cost to the individual in pain and discomfort, there is also a huge financial cost to employers resulting in lost working days, increased sick pay and reduced productivity. Most repetitive strain injuries are usually preventable with the correct risk assessment and health and safety measures in place.

As with the effective reduction of any health or safety risk, not only do managers first need to take action to implement risk-reducing measures, but employees then need to change their routine ways of working to incorporate new methods, equipment, or working practices.

A 'biopsychosocial' approach is needed. This means that while biological considerations should not be ignored, it is psychosocial factors that are most important. This involves the assessment of lifestyle factors both in and out of work and the implementation of personalised changes to ensure a focus on ability rather than disability.



Be flexible...



Benefits to employers	Benefits to employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Increased knowledge base on musculoskeletal issues and how to avoid them or manage them.➔ Retain staff and their skills or expertise gained in your workplace.➔ Reduce staff turnover.➔ Reduced recruitment and training costs.➔ More productive workforce & increased profits.➔ Enhance your image as an employer who invests in their staff.➔ Reduces the risk of costly prosecution and loss of image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Support in managing current disorders.➔ Prevent developing common bone and joint disorders.➔ Report symptoms or problems early to prevent worsening.➔ Access to leaflets and literature about the condition.➔ Support to stay in work rather than leave.➔ Having an employer who understands your problem.

What Can YOU Do?

Action can be dependent on size and nature of the workplace.

Examples include:

To increase awareness and interest:

- ➔ Take part in national campaigns promoting bone and joint care and publicise this on posters, leaflets, intranets, screen savers, payslips and through employee meetings.
- ➔ Provide information and leaflets to staff on how they can look after their bones and joints and prevent disorders developing.
- ➔ Have a themed day or week to promote the importance of taking care of bones and joints.
- ➔ Lunch 'n Learn sessions for staff on how to prevent musculoskeletal disorders or manage current conditions.
- ➔ Health fairs promoting all aspects of a healthy lifestyle.
- ➔ Screen savers with key messages in looking after bones and joints.

To make changes to lifestyles and behaviours:

- ➔ Involve employees in risk assessment, paying special attention to the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) Manual handling assessment charts and the risk assessment tool for upper limb disorders.
- ➔ Revisit risk assessments and consult with staff involved when planning any changes to the organisation of tasks.
- ➔ Where work involves frequent repetitive tasks, consider appropriate rest breaks and rotation of workers between tasks to allow muscles to recover.
- ➔ Encourage individuals to undertake ergonomic checks at their workstations and undertake changes required.

Continued...

Be flexible...



To provide a supportive and sustainable workplace:

- ➔ Implement a workplace policy and procedures to ensure prompt reporting of possible musculoskeletal symptoms, early assessment, discussion and follow-up of assessments.
- ➔ Support the rehabilitation of employees with musculoskeletal disorders by offering flexibility over working hours, tasks and breaks, to enable them to remain at work or to return at an early stage and continue working as normally as possible.

What Can WE Do?

- ➔ Provide a range of information/literature/posters etc.
- ➔ Help you to access further resources.
- ➔ Signpost you to means of practical support.
- ➔ *Arrange for a Physiotherapist to visit your site to talk to staff.
- ➔ *Arrange for Physiotherapist to be present at a Health Fair

*There may be a charge for this

Useful links and contacts:

Health and Safety Executive	hse.gov.uk
Faculty of Occupational Medicine	fom.ac.uk
Chartered Society of Physiotherapists	csp.org.uk
NHS Choices	nhs.uk/livewell