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Workplace safety - manual handling injuries

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Summary

- Twenty eight per cent of injuries to Victorian workers are caused by manual handling.
- Changing workplace design is an effective way to prevent manual handling injuries.
- There are organisations that can offer information and advice on modifying the workplace or work practices.

What is manual handling?

Twenty eight per cent of injuries to Victorian workers are caused by manual handling.

Manual handling covers a wide range of activities including: lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, restraining, throwing and carrying. It includes repetitive tasks such as packing, typing, assembling, cleaning and sorting, using hand-tools, operating machinery and equipment, and handling and restraining animals.

Not all manual handling tasks are hazardous, but because most jobs involve some form of manual handling, most workers are at some risk of manual handling injury.

Good posture and lifting techniques can help reduce the risks, but research indicates that making changes to workplace design is the most effective way to prevent manual handling injury.

Manual handling – identifying workplace hazards

Some factors in the workplace may increase the risk of an injury occurring. These hazards can be identified in different ways:

- Walk through the workplace and look for potential hazards.
- Talk over risk factors with workers.
- Check through injury records to help pinpoint recurring problems.
- Regularly monitor and update risk identification.

A detailed process, including requirements for identifying hazardous manual handling and implementing risk controls, is available from WorkSafe Victoria.

Manual handling – assessing the risks

The next step is to assess which factors are contributing to the risk of injury.

Typical risk factors that can increase the risk of injury include:

- type of work – working in a fixed posture for a prolonged period of time
- layout of the workspace – a cramped or poorly designed workspace can force people to assume awkward postures, such as bending or twisting
- weight of an object – a heavy load may be difficult to lift and carry
- location of an object – heavy objects that have to be lifted awkwardly, for example above shoulder height or from below knee level
- duration and frequency – increasing the number of times an object is handled or the length of time for which it is handled
- condition of an object – more effort may be required to manipulate badly designed or poorly maintained equipment
- awkward loads – loads that are difficult to grasp, slippery or an awkward shape
- handling a live person or animal – lifting or restraining a person or animal can cause sprains and other injuries.

Reducing or eliminating manual handling risks

After identifying workplace hazards you can do several things to control the risk of manual handling injuries. These tips can help reduce injury at home as well as at work.

Safety suggestions include:

- **change the task** – ask ‘Does this task need to be carried out? If so, does it have to be done this way?’
- **change the object** – for example, repack a heavy load into smaller parcels
- **change the workspace** – for example, use ergonomic furniture and make sure work benches are at optimum heights to limit bending or stretching
- **change the environmental conditions** – including heat, cold and vibration
- **use mechanical aids** – such as wheelbarrows, conveyor belts, cranes or forklifts
- **change the nature of the work** – for example, offer frequent breaks or the chance to do different tasks
- **offer proper training** – inexperienced workers are more likely to be injured.

Manual handling – protecting your back

The back is particularly vulnerable to manual handling injuries. Safety suggestions include controlling risk factors in the workplace, in addition to personal controls:

- Lift and carry heavy loads correctly by keeping the load close to the body and lifting with the thigh muscles.
- Never attempt to lift or carry loads if you think they are too heavy.
- Pushing a load (using your body weight to assist) will be less stressful on your body than pulling a load.
- Use mechanical aids or get help to lift or carry a heavy load whenever possible.
- Organise the work area to reduce the amount of bending, twisting and stretching required.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Cool down after heavy work with gentle, sustained stretches.
- Improve your fitness – exercise regularly to strengthen muscles and ligaments, and reduce excess body fat.
- Warm up cold muscles with gentle stretches before engaging in any manual work.

Professional advice about manual handling

Your workplace occupational health and safety coordinator can give you advice about managing the risks associated with manual handling.

Organisations such as WorkSafe Victoria or unions can offer information and advice on modifying the workplace or work practices to reduce the risk of manual handling injuries.

Where to get help

- Your manager or supervisor
- Your elected Health and Safety Representative and your workplace occupational health and safety coordinator
- Your doctor
- [WorkSafe Victoria](#) Tel. (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089 (toll free) – for general enquiries
- WorkSafe Victoria Emergency Response Line Tel. 13 23 60 – to report **serious workplace emergencies**, seven days, 24 hours

References

- *Manual handling*, WorkSafe Victoria.. [More information here](#).

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[Children should always be closely supervised near animals and taught how to behave safely around pets...](#)

- [Babies and safety](#)

[Most injuries to babies do not occur by chance - many are predictable and largely preventable...](#)

- [Baby care - moving from cot to bed](#)

[Some children are unsettled the first few nights in a 'big bed'. Try to be patient, loving and reassuring...](#)

- [Baby furniture - safety tips](#)

[Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs close supervision...](#)

- [Bicycle safety and children](#)

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- [Burns and scalds - children](#)

[Most hot tap water scald injuries to children happen in the bathroom...](#)

- [Child safety and injury prevention](#)

[By making a few practical changes to your home, you can dramatically reduce the risk of injury to your child...](#)

- [Eating tips for young toddlers](#)

[Children have a natural ability to sense when they are hungry and when they are full...](#)

- [Farm safety – children](#)

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- [Playgrounds and child safety](#)

[Play environments can be safe and beneficial for your child. With proper planning, you can make sure your child gets plenty of playtime activity...](#)

- [Poisoning and child safety](#)

[Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine...](#)

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[If you service your gas heater regularly and use it correctly, it will be safe and economical to use...](#)
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[Groundwater quality varies across Victoria; in some areas, groundwater is not suitable for use...](#)
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[Make sure your private drinking water supply is safe...](#)

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[Don't advertise a party via SMS or the internet to limit the risk of gate-crashers and violent situations...](#)

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[There is no such thing as a safe solarium tan...](#)

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- [Exercise safety](#)

[Training too hard or fast is a common cause of sports-related injuries...](#)

- [Heat stress and heat-related illness](#)

[Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness...](#)

- [Heat stress and older people](#)

[People aged 65 years and over are at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and need special care in hot weather...](#)

- [Heat stress – preventing heatstroke](#)

[Heatstroke is a life-threatening emergency that can be avoided by following simple prevention measures...](#)

- [Hot weather and child safety](#)

[Babies and children can quickly lose body fluids in hot weather, which can lead to dehydration...](#)

- [How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat](#)

[Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others...](#)

- [How to survive a rip current \(video\)](#)

[Learn what to do if you find yourself in a rip current...](#)

- [Hypothermia](#)

[The early responses to hypothermia will be moving around, seeking shelter, hair standing on end \(goosebumps\) and shivering...](#)

- [Walking - safety and environmental issues](#)

[Choose a route that is appropriate for your age and fitness level. Warm up and cool down with a slow, gentle pace to ease in and out of your exercise session...](#)

- [Water from natural resources](#)

[Drinking untreated water, such as creek water, bore water and sometimes even rainwater can lead to illnesses including gastroenteritis...](#)

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[You can reduce your risk of being mugged or robbed while travelling by taking a few simple precautions...](#)

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[When returning to a flood-affected area, remember that wild animals, including rats, mice, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden...](#)

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[When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease...](#)

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[Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards...](#)

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[Being prepared for a bushfire helps you cope better in an emergency...](#)

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[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health...](#)

- [Emergencies - floods](#)

[You and your family should work out an emergency plan in case of flood...](#)

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[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health. Planned burns are an important part of reducing the risk of bushfires...](#)

- [Talking to children about bushfire risk](#)

[Children can be affected by information regarding bushfire risk and they may become concerned about issues of safety. Talking to children openly in a way that suits their age, while also involving...](#)

- [Urban flash floods - FAQs](#)

[Urban flash flooding can happen quickly and without warning. Heavy rain causes runoff to collect in dips, car parks and roads, and there is a risk of contamination, injury and disease...](#)

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[When asbestos fibres become airborne, people working with asbestos may inhale particles which remain in their lungs...](#)

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[Wearing eye protection appropriate for the task can significantly reduce the risk of injury...](#)

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[Around 60 per cent of people killed in confined spaces were trying to rescue someone else...](#)

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[A hazardous substance can be inhaled, splashed onto the skin or eyes, or swallowed...](#)

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[The spread of many pathogens in the workplace can be prevented with regular hand washing...](#)

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[A person can be injured when handling objects in a variety of ways including pulling, pushing, holding or restraining...](#)

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[There are many ways to reduce exposure to excessive noise in the workplace...](#)

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[Any confined space on a farm can be dangerous and the threat may not be apparent until it's too late...](#)

- [Farm safety - crush injuries](#)

[Hand and finger injuries are the most common crush injuries that occur on Victorian farms...](#)

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[Falls are a common farm hazard, especially for older farmers...](#)

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[Any animal-handling practices can increase the risk of injury to farmers, farm workers and the animal...](#)

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[Poorly used or faulty machinery is a major cause of death and injury on farms...](#)

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[Farm workers often experience muscle and ligament strain, but good manual handling techniques and safe work habits can prevent most injuries...](#)

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[Most injuries and deaths involving quad bikes \(all-terrain vehicles\) are caused by the bike rolling over the rider...](#)

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