

Managing Musculoskeletal Disorders in Checkout Work – a Guide

What are Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs)?

The term MSD covers any injury, damage or disorder of the joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves or other soft tissues in the upper/lower limbs or the back. The common symptom is pain, but other symptoms may include discomfort, tingling, numbness, stiffness or swelling. Most MSD symptoms will clear up without any need of medical attention.

Who should read this guide?

Anyone who owns, manages or works in a retail store, should find this guide useful. But it is mainly aimed at managers and those responsible for health and safety in the store. It will also be useful to employees and their health and safety representatives.

Where do I start?

A good starting point is to walk around your checkout or point of sale area and look for any hazards – a hazard is anything that may cause harm. Then think about the risks – a risk is the chance, high or low, of somebody being harmed by the hazard, and how serious the harm could be.

Ask your employees what they think the hazards are, as they may notice things that are not obvious to you and may have some good ideas on how to control the risks.

Concentrate on the real risks – those that are most likely to cause harm. Consider the measures you are already taking to control the risks and ask if there is anything you should do to make your workplace safer. Once you have assessed the risks you need to consider the following:

- Can you avoid the risk?
- If not, can you reduce it?
- Can you control it?

Write down your significant findings and share them with your workforce. Keep it simple. To make life easier, model risk assessments and a template can be found at [MyIGA Risk Management](#) .

Who is responsible for the assessment?

As an employer, you should appoint someone competent to help you meet your health and safety duties. A competent person is someone with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to manage health and safety. You could appoint (one or a combination of):

- Yourself;

- one or more of your workers;
- someone from outside your business.

You probably manage most aspects of your business yourself, or with the help of your staff. But if you are not confident of your ability to manage all health and safety in-house, you may need some external help or advice. You can contact the SHE Specialist at TIR who will provide advice to individual stores.

Managers should have the necessary information and training to interpret the instructions and ensure workers follow them. They should:

- assess and manage risks specific to their store;
- be familiar with their company's health and safety policy;
- know where to refer problems they cannot solve themselves.

Consulting your employees Workplaces where employees are involved in taking decisions about health and safety are safer and healthier.

Collaboration with your employees helps you to manage health and safety in a practical way by:

- helping you spot workplace risks;
- making sure health and safety controls are practical;
- increasing the level of commitment to working in a safe and healthy way;
- providing feedback on the effectiveness of your arrangements and control measures.

You are legally required to consult with all your employees, in good time, on health and safety matters.

Consultation involves employers not only giving information to employees but also listening to them and taking account of what they say before making health and safety decisions.

Issues you should consult employees on could include:

- health and safety and the work they do;
- how risks are controlled;
- the best ways of providing information and training;
- staff sickness absence and accident records.

There is more information on your legal duties in Consulting employees on health and safety on the MyIGA WHS website [Consultation and Communication](#).

Controlling the risks

The key MSD risks in point-of-sale work are in these areas:

- manual handling and lifting of goods;
- awkward postures, such as twisting, reaching and leaning or using a lot of force;
- static and cramped postures;
- work organisation factors.

Manual handling and lifting goods

Manual handling injuries can occur almost anywhere in the workplace. Heavy manual labour, awkward postures and previous or existing injury can increase the risk. Where it is not possible to avoid handling a load, employers should look at the risks of that task and put sensible health and safety measures in place to prevent and avoid injury.

Where there is a need to lift, always consider the capability of the individual and:

- reduce the amount of twisting, stooping and reaching;
- avoid lifting from floor level;
- minimise carrying distances;
- assess the weight to be carried and whether the worker will need help.

Awkward postures – twisting, reaching, leaning or using a lot of force Good workstation design helps reduce injury or ill health. Make sure workstations are designed to help workers carry out their tasks with ease of access to equipment and controls. In particular, consider the following issues.

STATIC AND FIXED/CRAMPED POSTURES

Sitting or standing for long periods without movement can affect muscles and lead to fatigue and pain through reduced blood circulation. Provide suitable, adjustable seating and footrests if required for workers when most of their job can be done in a sitting position. Introduce breaks in activity through organised/scheduled rest breaks or encourage task variety and job rotation.

WORK ORGANISATION FACTORS

To ensure health and safety is managed effectively you should also:

- maintain equipment and encourage workers to report problems as this will help to prevent similar issues occurring;
- monitor the health of employees so you are aware of health problems and can intervene to prevent them being caused or made worse by work activities;
- provide training about the job that is relevant and effective. This should take place during work hours and should be provided free of charge.

EQUIPMENT

- Is there enough space under the counter to move and stretch?
Change storage arrangements to give counter staff more room.
- Are there problems with items failing to scan?
Use hand-held scanners for large or bulky items to prevent awkward postures.

- Can the equipment be adjusted to suit individuals?
Supply adjustable seating and allow staff to stand or sit, or provide footrests for those who require additional support.
- Are there ridges in the surfaces over which items are dragged and are edges smooth or rounded to avoid uncomfortable pressure?
Consider a redesign or adaptation to remove ridges and sharp edges.
- Is equipment regularly maintained and checked?
Make sure all equipment is regularly maintained and checked.



LOAD

- Can heavy items be scanned and passed to the customer without lifting them?
Slide items over surfaces if possible and use inline weighing scales to reduce handling.
- Are items frequently lifted into customers' bags and can security tags be removed easily?
Use hand-held scanners for large or bulky items to prevent manual handling.
- Are there appropriate arrangements in place to deal with the heaviest and bulkiest items sold?
Have a system to enter codes without having to scan heavy or awkward items.



INDIVIDUALS

- Does anyone need temporary arrangements and do workers know how to report problems?
Pregnant workers may require some temporary adjustments to the workspace, or their work schedule. The law requires you to make these, so far as reasonably practicable.
- Do workers know how to adjust the equipment, and do they take the time to set it up properly?
Ensure seating and other equipment are adjusted to individual need and suitable training is given.
- Have workers received training and information about their jobs?
Job rotation can reduce the length of time exposed to fixed postures.
- Do any of your workers already have an MSD that requires special adaptations?
Allow staff to vary the task, eg by switching from left- to right-handed scanning at checkouts and postures between sitting and standing.

TASK

- Are the most used items within easy reach, including the keypad?
Arrange/organise/design the most used equipment, ie ensure the keypad, scanner and cash drawer are within easy reach.
- Is most of the work carried out just below elbow level and is the cash drawer easy to access? Ensure the workstation's design means it's at a suitable height.
- Is most of the work done without awkward reaching or twisting from the waist?
Put security tags and their removers where they can be easily reached by staff to avoid awkward movements.
- Do workers have to twist their hands to scan items?
Reduce the need for workers to twist their hands to scan

items.

- Can the display screen be read without twisting or squinting?
Where card readers are difficult for staff to reach, they should ask customers to insert and remove their cards.
- Can staff ask for assistance if they need help?
Provide suitable guidance.
- Are seasonal items too bulky or heavy?
Make temporary arrangements, eg supply additional barcode cards to help scanning and avoid lifting



ENVIRONMENT

- Is the point of sale draughty, too hot or cold?
If open doors cause draughts, consider measures such as hallways, door closers or screens to alleviate the problem.
- Is there a problem with glare from external or internal light sources during any part of the day?
Use blinds to reduce glare on screens or high temperatures caused by direct sunlight.
- Is the point of sale cluttered with stuff that gets in the way?
Ensure consumables are properly stored at the point of sale to reduce clutter.

