

Manual Handling:

Lift Safe, Work Safe

Safe lifting technique, the TILE assessment, weight guidelines, employer duties under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 and how to report injuries.

 Last reviewed: August 2026  HSE · MHOR 1992  England, Scotland and Wales ukworkrights.co.uk

In Northern Ireland, similar duties come from Northern Ireland's own health and safety law. Contact HSENI (Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland), not the HSE.

Your employer's legal duties

- The **Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (MHOR)** require employers to manage the risks of manual handling
- Employers must **avoid hazardous manual handling** wherever reasonably practicable
- Where it cannot be avoided, they must **assess the risk** and take steps to reduce it
- Employers must provide **information and training** on safe manual handling
- Workers must **follow safe systems of work** and report any problems
- Around 511,000 workers were suffering from a work-related musculoskeletal disorder in 2024/25 (HSE)
- Handling, lifting or carrying accounts for around 17% of injuries to employees reported to HSE (2024/25)

▲ YOUR DUTY TOO

Workers must take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others. Follow the safe system of work provided — do not take shortcuts.

The TILE assessment



Task

Does the task involve holding loads away from the body? Twisting, stooping, reaching upwards? Repetitive handling? Long carrying distances?



Individual

Does the job require unusual strength or height? Is the person pregnant, recently injured, or new to the role? Are they trained?



Load

Is the load heavy, bulky, difficult to grip? Does it have sharp edges? Is its contents likely to shift? Is it a person or animal?



Environment

Are floors uneven, slippery, or sloping? Is there enough space? Is lighting poor? Are there temperature extremes or strong air movements?

How to lift safely

- **Stop and think:** plan the lift before you start. Where is the load going? Do you need help or equipment?
- **Position your feet:** stable base, feet shoulder-width apart, one foot slightly forward
- **Bend your knees** — not your back. Keep your back straight (natural curve)
- **Get a firm grip** on the load — hug it close to your body
- **Don't twist:** move your feet to turn, not your back
- **Look ahead,** not down
- **Put it down** then adjust position if needed — don't strain to place it
- For **team lifts** — one person calls the moves. Everyone lifts together

✔ USE THE EQUIPMENT

If a trolley, pallet truck, hoist or mechanical aid is available — use it. It's there for a reason. Never feel pressure to lift without it to save time.

BY THE NUMBERS

511k

Workers suffer musculoskeletal disorders from work each year (HSE)

35%

Of injuries to employees reported to HSE come from handling, lifting or carrying (2024/25)

£1bn+

Annual cost to UK employers from musculoskeletal injuries

25kg

Approximate guideline weight for a male worker — not a legal maximum

16kg

Approximate guideline weight for a female worker lifting close to the body at about waist height

Day 1

Training must be given before workers carry out manual handling tasks

Frequently asked questions

Q Is there a legal maximum weight I have to lift?

No. There is no single legal maximum weight under UK law. The 25kg/16kg figures are guidelines from HSE — not legal limits. The actual safe weight depends on the individual, the task, and the environment. The TILE assessment determines the safe approach for each situation.

Q Can I refuse to lift something I think is unsafe?

Yes. Under the Employment Rights Act 1996, workers are protected if they leave or refuse to return to work in circumstances of danger they reasonably believe to be serious and imminent. You cannot be dismissed or disciplined for this.

Q What if I hurt my back at work?

Report it immediately using your employer's accident book (your employer must report it under RIDDOR if you cannot do your normal work for more than seven days in a row, not counting the day of the accident). Seek medical attention. If the injury is due to inadequate training or equipment, you may have a personal injury claim — take legal advice.

Q Do the rules apply to office workers?

Yes — MHOR applies wherever there is manual handling, including offices. Filing cabinets, boxes of paper, deliveries, moving furniture — all need assessment. It's not just for warehouses and construction.

Delivery notes & attendance record

Before you start

Demonstrate rather than describe. The legal duty is to avoid the handling first — technique is the last resort, not the first answer.

Questions to ask the team

1. What is the heaviest thing you have lifted this week?
2. Could that job have been done with equipment instead of by hand?
3. Which tasks here do you think are the most awkward, regardless of weight?
4. Has anyone got back or shoulder pain they have not mentioned?

The law behind this talk

Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (regs. 4 and 4(1)(b)(ii)); Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c)

Employers must give workers comprehensible information, instruction and training on the risks they face — Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 s.2(2)(c) and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 reg. 10. Keep the record below as evidence that you did.

Attendance record

Topic

Manual Handling: Lift Safe, Work Safe

Date

Site / location

Delivered by

Actions agreed

Next talk due

Attendees

Name

Signature

Use the Print handout button to print this record. General guidance only, not legal advice. This toolbox talk is generic material and is not a substitute for a suitable and sufficient risk assessment by a competent person. Employers remain responsible for their duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

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HSE — HEALTH & SAFETY EXECUTIVE

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hse.gov.uk

ACAS

0300 123 1100

acas.org.uk

CITIZENS ADVICE

0800 144 8848

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