

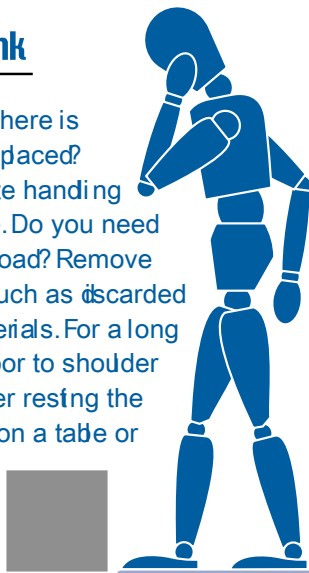
Getting to grips with manual handling

Good handling technique

Here are some important points, using a basic lifting operation as an example.

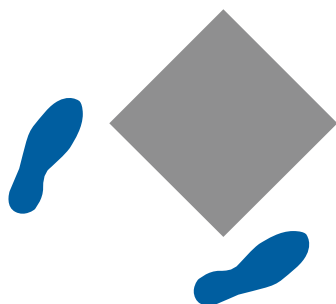
Stop and think

Plan the lift. Where is the load to be placed? Use appropriate handling aids if possible. Do you need help with the load? Remove obstructions such as discarded wrapping materials. For a long lift, such as floor to shoulder height, consider resting the load mid-way on a table or bench to change grip.



Position the feet

Feet apart, giving a balanced and stable base for lifting (tight skirts and unsuitable footwear make this difficult). Leading leg as far forward as comfortable and if possible, pointing in the direction you intend to go.



Adopt a good posture

When lifting from a low level, bend the knees. But do not kneel or overflex the knees. Keep the back straight, maintaining its natural curve (tucking in the chin helps). Lean forward a little over the load if necessary to get a good grip. Keep the shoulders level and facing in the same direction as the hips.



Get a firm grip

Try to keep the arms within the boundary formed by the legs. The best position and type of grip depends on the circumstances and individual preference, but must be secure. A hook grip is less tiring than keeping the fingers straight. If you need to vary the grip as the lift proceeds, do it as smoothly as possible.



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Keep close to the load

Keep the load close to the trunk for as long as possible. Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the trunk. If a close approach to the load is not possible, slide it towards you before trying to lift.

Don't jerk

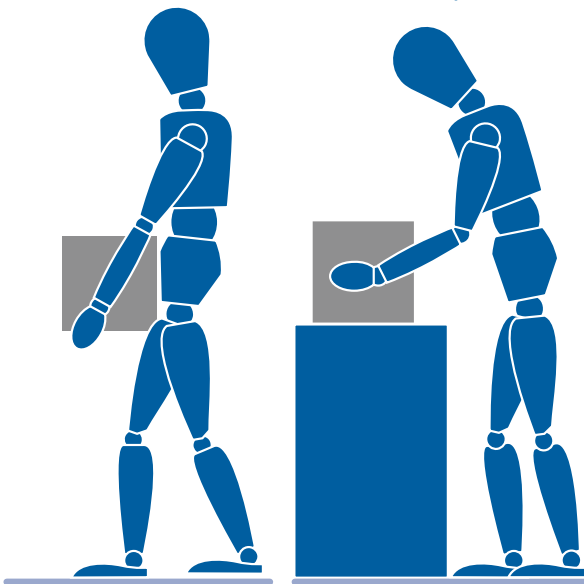
Lift smoothly, raising the chin as the lift begins, keeping control of the load.

Move the feet

Don't twist the trunk when turning to the side.

Put down, then adjust

If precise positioning of the load is necessary, put down first, then slide it into the desired position.



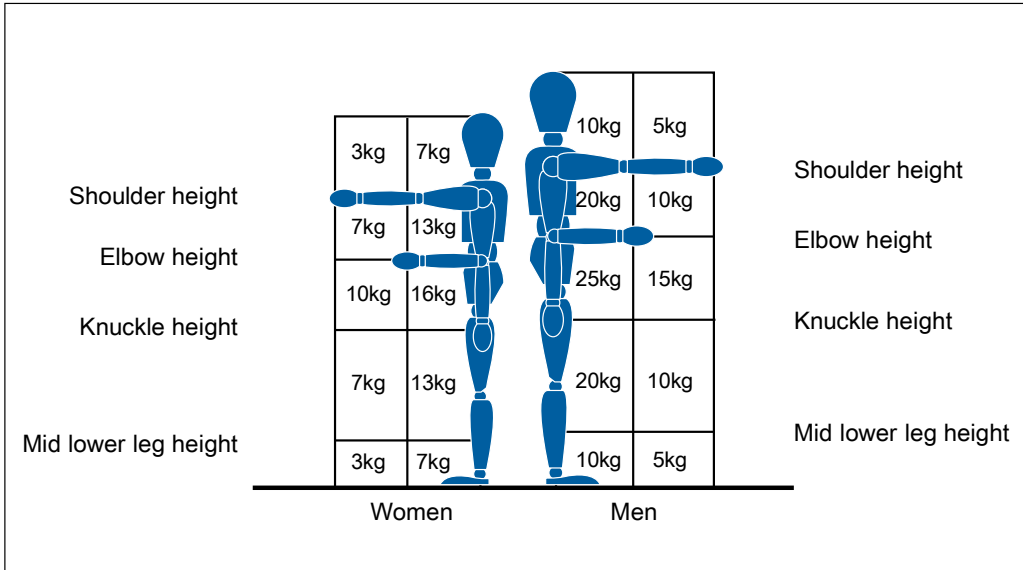
How do I know if there's a risk of injury?

It's a matter of judgment in each case, but there are certain things to look out for, such as people puffing and sweating, excessive fatigue, bad posture, cramped work areas, awkward or heavy loads or a history of back troubles. Operators can often highlight which activities are unpopular, difficult or arduous.

Can you be more definite?

There is no such thing as a completely 'safe' manual handling operation. It's difficult to be precise so many factors vary between jobs, workplaces and people. But the general risk assessment guidelines filter (see section 9) should help to identify when a more detailed risk assessment is necessary. Working within the guidelines will reduce the need for a more detailed risk assessment.

General risk assessment guidelines



- Each box in the diagram above shows guideline weights for lifting and lowering.
- Observe the activity and compare to the diagram. If the lifter's hands enter more than one box during the operation, use the smallest weight. Use an in-between weight if the hands are close to a boundary between boxes. If the operation must take place with the hands beyond the boxes, make a more detailed assessment.
- The weights assume that the load is readily grasped with both hands.

- The operator takes place in reasonable working conditions with the lifter in a stable body position.
- Any operation involving more than twice the guideline weights should be rigorously assessed - even for very fit, well-trained individuals working under favourable conditions.
- There is no such thing as a completely 'safe' manual handling operation. But working within the guidelines will cut the risk and reduce the need for a more detailed assessment.

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Twisting

Reduce the guideline weights if the lifter twists to the side during the operation. As a rough guide, reduce them by 10% if the handler twists beyond 45°, and by 20% if the handler twists beyond 90°.

Frequent lifting and lowering

The guideline weights are for infrequent operations - up to about 30 operations per hour - where the pace of work is not forced, adequate pauses to rest or use different muscles are possible, and the load is not supported for any length of time. Reduce the weights if the operation is repeated more often. As a rough guide, reduce the weights by 30% if the operation is repeated once or twice a minute, by 50% where the operation is repeated five to eight times a minute, and by 80% where the operation is repeated more than 12 times a minute.

Are you saying I mustn't exceed the guidelines?

No. The risk assessment guidelines are not safety limits for lifting. But work outside the guidelines is likely to increase the risk of injury, so you should examine it closely for possible improvements. You should remember that you must make the work less demanding if it's reasonably practicable to do so.

Further Information

Manual handling: Solutions you can handle
HSG115 1994 HSE Books
ISBN 0 7176 0693 7

Back in work: Managing back pain in the workplace - A leaflet for employers and workers in small businesses
Leaflet INDG333 HSE Books 2000 (single copy free)

Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992. Guidance on Regulations L23 (Second edition) HSE Books 1998
ISBN 0 7176 2415 3

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
SI 1999/3242
TSO ISBN 0 11 085625 2

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992
SI 1992/2793 HMSO
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