

A better way of working Preventing sprains and strains in construction

Sprains and strains, also known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), are a major issue in the construction industry. The financial and human cost is high, yet the risks are often overlooked. Improve your margins and reduce injury costs by modifying the way work is done.



MSDs account for nearly 50% of workers' compensation claims



MSD statutory claims payments cost more than \$60 million per year



On average, 40 work days are lost to MSDs per claim



**Hazardous manual tasks are the primary cause of injuries.
Slips, trips and falls are second.**



15% of workers with MSD injuries do not return to work



Uninsured MSD costs can be 4-10 times the claims cost

Risk management is a continual process led by the principal contractor (PC) from the planning and design stage and throughout the project.

Start the conversation

- Early and ongoing engagement will benefit your business, workers and stakeholders.
- Workers often know what the problems are and how to fix them.
- Engage with workers and stakeholders about MSD risks to identify and manage hazardous manual tasks and other workplace hazards.
- Subcontractors may identify sources of risk that are out of their control that the PC can eliminate or minimise.

Preventing sprains and strains in construction

MSDs are a common workplace injury that can occur suddenly or, more commonly, from gradual wear and tear. Often, the risks are not recognised. Links have been identified between MSDs and psychosocial factors such as work-related stress, and chronic disease risk factors, such as obesity and smoking.

High risk work and hazardous manual tasks

High risk and hazardous work often include high mental (e.g. time pressures and high workload) and physical (e.g. high force and sustained awkward postures) demands. For example, lifting a heavy beam using an awkward posture while working at height with time pressure to complete the work.

Often these compounding risk factors are not recognised as relevant to the management of high risk and hazardous work. However, these MSD risk factors can have a significant impact on safety during high risk work activities. MSD risks must be managed together with other workplace hazards.

A broader, more holistic approach to risk management can highlight the links between MSDs and other hazardous and high risk work - assisting workers, supervisors and senior leaders to identify and manage the risks together. This approach focuses on the design of safe and healthy work and culture change.

“Developing useful tools that help the industry better manage HMT and protect people’s bodies is a positive step towards safer workplaces.” Melanie Roberts, Master Builders Queensland.

“Sprains and strains are such a big problem in construction. It’s good to see industry working together to come up with solutions.” Tom Raggatt, John Holland.

Preventing MSDs

Support

Commitment is essential to improve work health and safety. Managers have the authority to dedicate the resources required to make systematic change and the influence to promote a strong health and safety culture.

Collaborate

Risk management should be a collaborative process that captures input from relevant stakeholders, including workers. By drawing on the knowledge and experience of everyone involved, more informed decisions can be made to eliminate or minimise HMT risks.

Integrate

Use an integrated risk management approach where the physical, psychological and chronic disease risk factors associated with a work activity are managed together with other WHS hazards. MSD prevention should be considered in policies and systems, including:

- procurement
- training
- injury investigation
- induction
- supervision
- injury management
- data collection
- reporting
- project planning and design.

Targets

Ensure MSD risks are properly identified, assessed and controlled by setting targets and lead performance measures to drive an increased focus on MSD prevention.

Prioritise

Pay particular attention to HMTs as the most frequent cause of MSDs. Slips, trips and falls are the second most common mechanism and are a significant contributor to injuries in the construction industry.

HMT tools

MSD-specific assessment tools, including the **manual tasks risk management worksheet** are a great way to generate discussion about day-to-day body stressing hazards, the sources of risk and ways to control them. They also help workers understand:

- the likelihood of sprain or strain injury
- body stressing risks
- the impact of these risks on the work activity.

Register

Identify the HMTs together with other hazards associated with a work activity or task. Record the activity or task, risk, source of risk and control measures on a risk register. Ensure that prioritised HMTs are flagged for consideration in future project and safe design forums. This ensures that lessons learned and information sharing is passed on and ongoing.

HMT risk register examples can be found at [worksafe.qld.gov.au](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au).

Legislation

Focus on the sources of risk when implementing controls. Section 60 (2) of the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 outlines matters which must be considered to control a risk. Refer to this and the Hazardous manual tasks code of practice 2011 to assist you to meet your work health and safety duties.

Benefits of reducing MSDs in construction

- Improved efficiency, productivity and profitability.
- Reduced worker disability.
- Reduced workers’ compensation premiums.
- Improved worker health.
- Strengthened health and safety culture.
- Compliance with work health and safety legislation.
- Retention of skilled staff.

For more information visit [worksafe.qld.gov.au](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call 1300 362 128.