

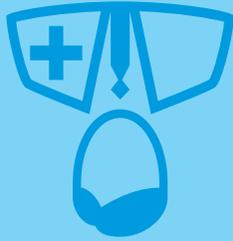


Back aches and pains are the most common reason for absence



Lost time and productivity is most noticeable in the winter months

MSDs are the biggest reason for referral to Occupational Health



Did you know? We lose nearly 5000 work days due to MSDs each year

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Getting ready for Winter

Advice for preventing musculoskeletal and sports injuries during the winter months



What exercises can I do to prevent a musculoskeletal injury?

Performing strengthening exercises on your back is an essential part of preventing injuries in the workplace, especially if you are involved in manual work. It's also very important to strengthen your abdominal (stomach) muscles as these are your core stabilisers and will also help prevent back injury during heavy lifting or carrying. Below are some exercises that may help you build strength in your back.

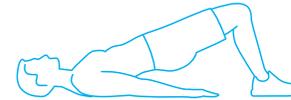
It is important to note that this is a general strengthening programme that can be adapted if you have a specific injury.

If you have an injury and are struggling with some of the exercises below, consult a health professional so that you can be given alternatives to the exercises that you are unable to do.

Strength

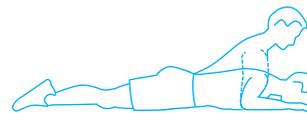
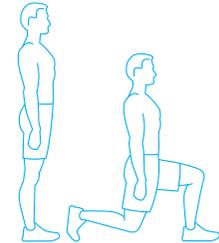
- Hold each exercise for 5-10 seconds and repeat 10 times
- Remember to continue breathing throughout the exercises
- Ensure that these exercises are pain free in your lower back. If you are in pain it may mean you are in the wrong position and may need advice from your physiotherapist.

Pelvic stability exercise: lying on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, place your hands on your hip bones. Flatten your back against the floor and arch your back away from the floor. Now find a position between these two extremes where your hips should feel like they are facing the ceiling. Maintaining this position, pull your belly button towards your spine so that you feel the muscle under your fingers (just inside your hip bones) contract.



Bridging: lying on your back with your pelvis in a neutral position and lower stomach muscles contracted (pull belly button to spine), slowly raise buttocks from the floor, keeping your pelvis stable and body in a straight line.

Lunges: place one foot in front of the other. Bend both knees together until you have a 90° bend in both. Ensure that your front knee does not go over your front foot when bending to 90°. Return to the starting position. Perform 1 set of 10 repetitions per leg. Once you can do this pain free, progress onto a stepping lunge, starting with your feet hip width apart, lunging forwards to a 90°/90° position in your legs and then back to the start position. Alternate your leading foot while performing this lunge.



Back extension stretch: lying on your stomach, gently come up onto your elbows, keeping hips on the ground. Hold the position for 10 counts. Push up further putting the pressure on the lower arm, but always ensure that hips are on the ground and you only feel a stretch, not pain. Only progress the range as your back allows. Gently press up, keeping your hips on the ground.

Stretch

- Hold each stretch for at least 10 seconds
- Hold a steady stretch, do not bounce

Please take note of the following before starting any of the exercises in this guide:

- The intention of this guide is to provide you with advice and exercises which can be done both at work and at home
- This guide is based on the latest research in this field and contains the best advice available
- The exercises in this guide are general stretching and strengthening exercises. If you suffer from any condition it is important to seek medical advice before starting any of the exercises within this pack.

Beating the winter blues

It's thought that the winter blues or Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) affects over 2 million people, of all age ranges, across the UK. Even children can be affected.

Key symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder:

- Depression
- Sleep problems
- Lethargy
- Overeating
- Irritability
- Feeling down and unsociable

Top tips

Keep active: an hour's walk can be just as effective as light treatment for SAD.

Get outside: go outdoors in natural daylight as much as possible. When inside, sit by a window as much as you can.

Keep warm: staying warm can reduce the winter blues. Keep warm with hot drinks and hot food. Wear warm clothes and shoes, and aim to keep your home well heated.

Eat healthily: a healthy diet will help boost your mood, give you more energy and can help with weight loss.

Light therapy: one way to get light therapy at home in winter is to sit in front of a light box for up to two hours a day. Light boxes give out very bright light – at least 10 times stronger than ordinary home and office lighting.

Take up a new hobby: keeping your mind active with a new interest can help to ward off the blues.

Spend time with your friends and family: socialising is good for your mental health. Make an extra effort to stay in touch and enjoy social events.

Talk it through: talking treatments such as counselling and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can help you cope with symptoms, but even just talking your feelings through with a close friend or a family member can be a great help.

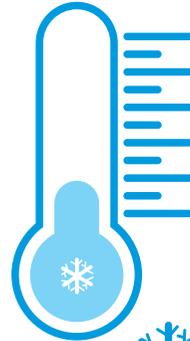
The most important thing to remember is that if your symptoms become so bad that you can't live a normal life, you must see your GP for medical guidance.

To find out more about SAD, visit the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/dealing-with-winter-blues-sad

What is a musculoskeletal or sports injury and why do they happen?

Musculoskeletal injuries and disorders (MSDs) account for a significant number of injuries both at work and outside of work. A musculoskeletal injury means an injury or disorder of the muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, nerves, or related soft tissue including a sprain, strain or inflammation or long-term conditions such as arthritis. 1 in 7 of all healthcare appointments that take place are as a result of an MSD.

There are a number of activities and hazards that can increase the risk of sustaining an MSD including repetitive movements, awkward postures, forceful exertions and the environment.



Winter can be one of the most hazardous times of the year because of:

- Poor lighting
- Slippery roads and pavements
- Cold weather preventing muscles being suitably warmed up.

How to reduce the risks of injury associated with too much sitting at your desk:

- Change your tasks regularly so that you don't spend too much time in one position
- When printing, if you can, use a network printer that's a longer distance away from you to get you on your feet
- Try to take a short break for a few minutes each hour, even if it's just a stretch and walk around your work station. Do some gentle exercises for your arms and wrists to avoid any stiffness
- Drink plenty of water. Dehydrated tissues are stiffer and more prone to strain and injury
- Ensure that your workstation is set up properly. Your monitor should be an arm length away from you with the height of the monitor level with your eyebrows.



Advice if you have sustained an acute musculoskeletal injury or disorder

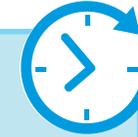
The first 24 hours

Rest: after sustaining an injury it is important to rest the affected area to avoid the injury worsening.

Compression: excess swelling can be controlled by gently compressing the injury area. For example, a sock or tubi-grip can be used over an ankle or foot to control swelling. Remove any compression before going to sleep at night.

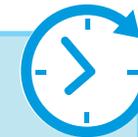
Ice: following an injury, the affected area is likely to become swollen. This is a normal response to an accident, but too much swelling can delay healing. Apply something cool over the injury for 20-minutes. Frozen peas wrapped up in a tea towel works well.

Elevation: finally, the affected area should be elevated for approximately 20-minutes to help reduce excess swelling.



The next 48 hours

- You should try to use the painful area more and in a normal way as this will help you recover quickly.
- Avoid sports or heavy lifting until you have less discomfort and you are able to move the affected area normally.
- If your injury is in your leg you can reduce the strain by
 - Leading with your good leg when going upstairs.
 - Leading with your problem leg when going downstairs.
 - Using a handrail if there is one



How to prevent musculoskeletal injuries, particularly during winter

Warm up: it is widely known that if you don't warm up before exercise then the risk of injury increases. The same goes for activities at work which involves physical effort. Make sure you warm up to gradually increase blood and oxygen flow to your muscles.

Eat healthily: evidence suggests that a lack of calcium and iron can contribute towards injuries. Lack of Iron has been suggested to increase build of lactic acid ('the burn' experienced during exercise) which can contribute to muscle injuries. A lack of calcium can weaken bones and has been shown to cause injuries such as shin splints.

Stay up to date: make sure you are up to date with appropriate training at work, including manual handling

According to research, people suffer from increased joint stiffness, numbness, pain and dull movement of the fingers, wrist, knee joint and foot a in winter than they do in the summer.

(Inaba, 2010)

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