

Manual handling

Purpose:

To promote the importance of correct manual handling techniques, identify risks and know how to avoid them.

Why:

To help prevent accidents and injuries on farms and horticultural sites.

Who:

This Toolbox Talk aims to help those with little knowledge of safe manual handling techniques and for those looking to refresh their knowledge.

TIAH Capability Framework area:

This aligns with the knowledge and skills in the Health and Safety area.

<https://tiah.org/tiah-capability-framework>

Talk leader instructions:

- Prepare to do the talk in a suitable/quiet location with no distractions
- Consider using some of the resources as part of the talk, e.g. showing a video
- Engage with participants, ask questions and give everyday examples
- Conclude with a brief review
- Get everyone to sign the form. Make sure to write the name of the farm and the date. Keep a copy in your Health and Safety records
- Ensure all participants have access to a copy of this document to refer to once the session has finished. This could be electronic and emailed or printed

Notes:

Background

Manual handling includes the transporting or supporting of a load or bodily force. It also includes lifting, putting down, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving loads.

Working in agriculture or horticulture often involves manual handling tasks like lifting and moving objects or livestock, pushing items such as trolleys, and performing repetitive motions. These activities carry significant risks, including back injuries, strains, and repetitive strain injuries. Poor manual handling techniques can all contribute to long-term health problems.



By the end of this Toolbox Talk, participants should understand the main risks associated with poor manual handling, how to identify and avoid risks, and the correct manual handling techniques.

Main learning points



Risks

The main risks associated with poor manual handling include:

- **Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs):** Including back injuries, sprains and strains
- **Slips, trips and falls:** Often caused by uneven surfaces, muddy conditions or poor footwear
- **Repetitive strain injuries (RSIs):** Resulting from repeated tasks like stacking or carrying loads
- **Accidents involving livestock or machinery:** Such as handling animals or using heavy equipment incorrectly

Prevention

Before doing any manual handling, make sure you're trained and can assess the risks. If you're not sure or haven't been trained, ask your supervisor first. You will need to consider what hazards pose a risk, evaluate the level of risk and implement measures to either reduce or eliminate the risk.

Q: What actions could you take to help reduce or eliminate the risk?

Responses might include:

- Ensure you know the proper lifting techniques
- Know what your limitations are
- Use mechanical aids where possible
- Alter tasks or take breaks to prevent repetitive strain injuries
- Maintain ergonomic postures
- Use gloves or padded grips for better hand protection
- Think smarter – could items or materials be delivered to where they need to be, so you don't need to move them?

Refer to the HSE Manual handling assessment charts to help you assess the most common risks: (MAC tool): <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg383.pdf>

Notes:

Suggestions/ ideas:

Step-by-step guide to safe lifting

Using proper techniques, mechanical aids and keeping workspaces clear helps reduce strain and prevent accidents. Staying mindful of safety helps keep everyone healthy, productive and injury-free.

Practice: Using a cardboard box, follow the step-by-step guide to safe lifting below to practice the lifting, carrying and setting down technique.

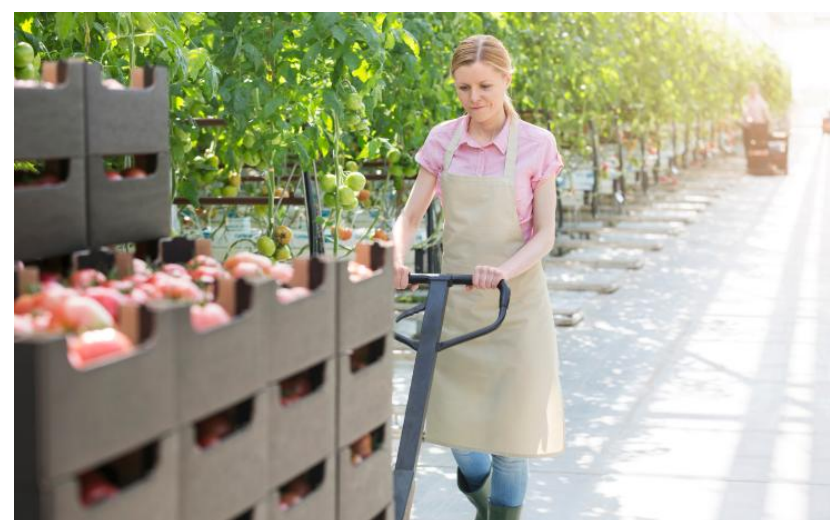
- **Plan your lift:** Assess the load and decide if you need help or equipment
- Ensure your path is clear: check for obstacles and trip hazards
- **Position yourself correctly:** Stand close to the object with your feet on either side for balance
- **Grip the load securely:** Use both hands grip firmly, ideally under the load
- **Lift smoothly:** Use your legs to push up, keeping your back straight and the load close to your chest
- **Carry carefully:** Keep your head up and look where you're going. Avoid sudden movements
- **Set the load down properly:** Bend your knees and lower the load smoothly, maintaining control throughout

Optional: Watch this short video which demonstrates how to brace your core muscles correctly to help eliminate back problems when manual handling.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBb7TfmdzCk>

Manual handling aids

These are essential for helping to reduce physical strain and minimising the risk of injuries.

Below are some examples of equipment used in agriculture and horticulture:



Forklifts/telehandlers:

- Used for lifting and transporting heavy loads like pallets of produce, fertiliser or equipment
- Suitable for larger tasks where significant weight needs to be moved over greater distances

Pallet jacks:

- Ideal for moving pallets or large, flat loads short distances.
- Available in manual or powered (electric) versions

Sack trolleys:

- Lightweight and versatile, used for moving sacks of seeds, fertiliser, or other smaller loads
- Useful for reducing bending and carrying by workers

Wheelbarrows:

- Common for transporting tools, soil, plants or produce across farms or gardens
- Often used on uneven terrain

Lifting hoists:

- Designed for heavy or awkward objects that require more controlled movement, such as barrels, tanks or machinery parts

Conveyor belts or rollers:

- Useful for tasks involving repetitive movement of materials, such as transferring produce during packaging or storage

Straps, slings and hooks:

- Useful for tasks involving repetitive movement of materials, such as transferring produce during packaging or storage

Notes:

Suggestions/ ideas:

Discussion points



Choose two of the following discussion points to discuss with your team and complete the remaining one at another time.

Q: What steps can you take to reduce the risk of injury when lifting?

Responses might include:

- **Do a risk assessment** to assess the level of risk
- **Plan ahead** to consider if you may need extra help or equipment to lift the object
- **Ask for help** if you're finding it uncomfortable or difficult when lifting
- **Check the ground conditions** to see if it's uneven or wet etc.
- **Check your path** to make sure it's clear and that there are no trip hazards if you're moving an object
- **Check your posture** and stand close to the object with your feet on either side for balance
- **Check you can grip** the object securely using both hands to get a firm grip, ideally underneath it
- **Use your legs** to push up, keeping your back straight and the load close to your chest
- **Keep your head up** and look where you're going
- **Keep it smooth** and avoid any sudden jerky movements
- **Avoid twisting** when lifting or lowering
- **Bend your knees** and lower the load smoothly, maintaining control throughout

Q: What manual handling challenges do you face in the course of your work? How do you handle those challenges?

Responses might include:

- **Heavy and awkward loads** – Such as lifting sacks of feed or fertiliser, moving bales, planting trees, or lifting/moving gates, troughs, livestock handling equipment, tools and trays or sacks of produce
- **Repetitive tasks** – Such as harvesting, pruning and packing which could lead to the risk of strain injuries
- **Outdoor conditions** – Including uneven terrain, mud, wet or icy surfaces. Extreme weather conditions can increase the risks of injury
- **Limited mechanical aid** – In some cases the availability or use of mechanical handling equipment is restricted by space or by the specific task

Q: What machinery, equipment or lifting aids could you use to help reduce the risk of injury?

Responses might include:

- Sack trolley
- Pallet jack or lift
- Scissor lift
- Wheelbarrow
- Lever hoist/Livestock hoist
- Crane arm (for forklift)
- Forklift/telehandler
- Lifting platform or table
- Hydraulic stacker



As a TIAH member, you can also invite your team to complete the **Essential skills: manual handling course** available on the TIAH Learning Hub, where they'll earn Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points.

You'll also have access to a wide range of courses, tools and resources to help you in your career development: <https://tiah.org/membership>

To help reduce or prevent the risk of injury through manual handling, it’s essential that you understand the risks involved. You should always follow best practice, know what the proper manual handling techniques are, and know what machinery, equipment or tools are available to assist you.

Resources:

HSE: Agriculture – Manual handling: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/manual-handling.htm>

HSE: Manual handling at work: A brief guide: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg143.pdf>

HSE: Manual handling at work: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/manual-handling/index.htm>

HSE: Making the best use of lifting and handling aids: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg398.pdf>

HSE: Manual handling assessment charts (the MAC tool): <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg383.pdf>

HSE: Agriculture case study - Manual handling: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/experience/manual-handling.htm>

HSE video: Preventing injuries from manual handling – Go Home Healthy:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIMSsJunXB4>

Engineering Education video: Manual Handling 8 basic steps to correct lifting technique:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lq2dJKw6-Uk>

GotSafety Training video: Lifting Techniques: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1n5ECgByxY>

NHS: Back pain: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/back-pain/>

NHS: Strength exercises: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-exercises/>

Toolbox Talk participants

Toolbox Talk: **Manual handling**

Name of farmDate

Talk leader name.....

Name	Signature	Date