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IN THE
COMMUNITY**



THE PRINCE'S
RESPONSIBLE
BUSINESS NETWORK

Musculoskeletal health in the workplace:

a guide for employers

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Public Health
England



The impact of MSK in numbers

1 in 8

of the working age population reported having an MSK



The prevalence of MSK in the workforce is likely to increase

6.5m
in 2008

7m
in 2030

Employment rate for people who report MSK as their main health condition is

59.7%

In 2013, **more days** of sickness absence were attributed to back, neck and muscle pain than any other cause.

In 2013, **30.6m** days of sickness absence could be attributed to MSK

23% of all working days lost

33% of English **long-term** sickness absence is attributed to MSK

In 2015, **13%** of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) recipients reported MSK as their main condition



In 2010, ESA claimants with MSK were **more likely than those with other conditions, to attribute their health conditions to work – 36%** related it to work

An estimated **9.5m** working days were lost due to work related MSK, an average of 17 days lost for each case. This represents 40% of all days lost due to work related ill-health in 2014/15. Agriculture; construction; health and social care; and transportation and storage industries all show elevated rates of MSK.



Good musculoskeletal (MSK) health is integral to a full working life. It supports us with functional mobility and dexterity, balance and co-ordination, and contributes to muscular strength and endurance; essential to nearly all forms of work. It also enables us to stay physically and mentally fit and reduce the occurrence of other health problems.

Action should be taken at all ages to invest in enhancing education, awareness and opportunities to engage in understanding good MSK health and how to reduce the risks of developing an MSK problem. Employers have a legal duty to provide safe workplaces that do not damage an employee's health, and a key part of this is considering risk around MSK.

Healthy bone and muscle development is maintained if a healthy diet is coupled with regular physical activity into and throughout adolescence. This then needs to be continued throughout adulthood for people to have the physical capacity for all the activities they want and need to do, including work. Healthy bones and muscles, along with co-ordination, balance and muscular endurance – reduce the risk of MSK problems in our working life.

The Department of Health guidelines recommend that an adult should aim to carry out a minimum of 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of moderate intensity physical activity a week – ideally spread over at least 5 days.



Read Department of Health guidelines for physical activity

Each workplace has its own circumstances that can impact on our MSK health positively and negatively. This toolkit can help you understand the challenges specific to your workplace, reduce the risks of MSK problems, help to maintain those with existing problems in work and aid recovery where possible.

Looking after MSK health throughout our working lives will not only benefit people during employment but will also benefit overall MSK health and independence once retired. Good MSK health benefits our health holistically and is an important part of our overall health and wellbeing. Our MSK health is something to value and look after at ALL ages.

MSK problems such as back, shoulder and knee pain are the leading cause of working days lost in the UK – it is estimated that 31 million days a year are lost due to these problems.

MSK problems are characterised by pain, stiffness, and limitation of movement, which can affect the ability to work at any age.

Poor MSK health affects all industries and business sectors, from construction to banking. There are risks to employees who are deskbound, just as there are to workers in manufacturing or construction.

MSK contributes to the £100 billion a year that the UK economy is losing due to sickness absence – your business is part of this loss.

Sickness absence cost UK businesses an average of £522 per case – with MSK problems being a prime contributor to this alongside stress and other mental health issues. This cost is likely to rise as a consequence of our ageing workforce, because older workers are at greater risk of MSK problems.

“Any of the many different kinds of conditions that affect bones, joints and muscles might harm working life. Importantly, the conditions of working life have an impact on their prevention, development, lifetime course and effects. Employers and employees are coming to recognise their shared interests in preventing these problems when they can, and alleviating and accommodating the effects as they emerge. That is why I commend this informative and clearly written toolkit.”

Professor Dame Carol Black Special Advisor to the Department of Health and Public Health England

Small and medium sized firms (SMEs) can be disproportionately affected through the loss of key staff for any period of time because of MSK ill-health, so helping employees to stay fit and well, or to return to work after illness is especially important.

This toolkit provides practical advice for all employers small, medium and large on how you can create an environment where MSK health is supported in your business and the impact of MSK problems is reduced.

This toolkit sits alongside HSE guidance that sets out the legal expectation for health and safety by employers to protect their staff and to actively consider risks to MSK health alongside other physical and mental health risks. Where MSKs are caused or made worse because of work there is a responsibility on the employer to address it through assessing the risk and reducing the risk as far as is reasonably practical.

The toolkit goes beyond just addressing the risks of injury in the workplace and towards promoting health and wellbeing in the worker and the workplace, advocating and supporting employers to take a proactive approach to preventing an MSK issue occurring and preventing work loss if a problem arises.

Helping employees to help themselves prevent issues – and manage existing issues – is a vital ethos to instil into any organisation. Overall this will create a positive culture to encourage people to invest in their MSK health in and outside of work, with benefits for their general health as well. It will also enable people to better manage any MSK problem that impacts on work and to be more able to participate in work even if they do have an ongoing MSK problem.

This toolkit is a simple step-by-step guide to dealing with back, neck, muscle and joint pain at work. It will help you pick out the best free resources that are right for you and your team, whatever the size of your organisation. It does not involve significant expense and can save you money in the long run.

Checklist of actions



> Be prepared – understanding MSK:

- Do you recognise that MSK health is important to your workplace and employees?
- Have you communicated to them that you recognise the importance of MSK health?
- Have you asked them about MSK problems and solutions?
- Have you measured the extent and nature of any MSK problems?
- Are you ready to build your approach?

> Managing MSK health:

- Do you know the risks to MSK health in your workplace and the problems employees encounter?
- Have you fully considered your responsibilities under health and safety legislation to protect employees?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of individuals or groups in your business to enable an employee to stay in work clearly defined?
- Do you encourage and support open conversations to enable early reporting and solution-finding that enable employees to stay in work?
- Do you encourage and support self-management?

> Knowledge and training:

- Do you know how to access occupational health services?
- Do you know which external resources you can use to support employees to stay in work (i.e. government grants to aid reasonable adjustments)?
- Is support for MSK problems signposted to all your employees?
- Do you review individual needs and make reasonable adjustments and adaptations to their work?
- Do you support their physical and mental health?
- Is training on MSK health for managers incorporated into your health and wellbeing strategy?
- Is training on MSK health for employees incorporated into your health and wellbeing strategy?
- Does training include the link between MSK health and mental health?
- Does training include communication skills?
- Is training implemented?
- Is there feedback to ensure training meets needs?
- Is training evidenced-based?
- Do employees know where to find information?

What this toolkit will do

The toolkit explains:



Why MSK health is important to you and for your business



What can be done to prevent MSK problems and reduce work loss



How you can achieve this, whether you are a small, medium or large employer

“We recognise that the MSK toolkit is an important resource in helping other organisations to make the journey towards better musculoskeletal health, not just with their own staff but also throughout their supply chains.”

L'Oréal Professionnel

“We see the MSK toolkit as an essential resource that will help us to understand how we can apply initiatives in our factories to encourage MSK health.”

Heather Turner, Human Resources Manager, William Turner & Son

“I think this toolkit is a fantastic resource for employers. It's really easy to read and has some excellent resources, links and information. At UK Power Networks, we believe it's really important to recognise the impact MSK issues can have on mental as well as physical health, and the toolkit really helps identify this. I would urge all employers to use the toolkit to identify where they are taking positive actions, and where they could go further”

Dawn McDonald, UK Power Networks

“We like the idea of an MSK toolkit for employers. Anything proactive is useful and a prevention tool is really beneficial.”

Colette Cloete, Leicestershire Police

“For all employers, but particularly those whose workforces are engaged in manual tasks or in conditions in which MSK issues have a propensity to develop, it's essential to have in place policies to protect and make staff aware of MSK issues and risks. This Toolkit provides information, resources and advice which are essential reading for any employer whose work could cause MSK issues”

Victoria Curtis and Jane Williams, Midshire Foods



Professor Kevin Fenton

Director of health and wellbeing, Public Health England

Work has generally become less physically demanding, through advances in technology and automation. Yet MSK issues increasingly affect our population, our workforce and our businesses.

Poor MSK health affects all ages. The ageing population, rising obesity rates and reduced physical activity will increase the prevalence of poor MSK health. For many years there has been a perception that MSK conditions are unavoidable and part of the ageing process, leading to a focus on treatments to alleviate the pain and discomfort of MSK damage. However, most issues can be prevented and the workplace offers a unique opportunity to prevent the development of MSK conditions.

Employers have a responsibility to support the health and wellbeing of their staff. It also makes great business sense. Along with mental health, poor MSK health accounts for the majority of sickness absence in the UK. It is estimated that 9.5 million working days are lost each year as a consequence of the MSK problems affecting over 10 million people.

This toolkit demonstrates the many simple ways you can address MSK health in the workplace. These are steps all organisations can take, regardless of size, to prevent employees developing MSK issues and support those with MSK conditions to stay in or return to work. There are also links between MSK and mental health, so we advise that this toolkit is used in tandem with the Mental Health Toolkit for Employers.

Like all our toolkits, this document has been produced with business for business. We have teamed up with Business in the Community and The Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA) for its production to ensure that it is tailored to the needs of employers and based on the best evidence of 'what works'.

Protecting the health and wellbeing of employees is critical to the health and economic wellbeing of our population. I would encourage you to read, use and discuss this toolkit with your internal and external colleagues so we can strengthen the resilience of our population and businesses.



Professor Anthony Woolf

Chair of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA)

Musculoskeletal (MSK) health is central to being able to work at all ages. It gives ability to move without pain or difficulty – essential for most types of work. MSK problems are the commonest causes of a person's inability to work. They affect people of all ages, but have greatest impact in older people. They are associated with anxiety and depression. Many suffer without complaining as their job depends on being physically capable. The impact of MSK problems on work is predicted to increase and will be a challenge with people working into older ages.

There is a two-way interaction between MSK problems and work. MSK problems may occur if certain risks in the working environment are not recognised and catered for. Additionally, the MSK problems developed outside of work can limit a person's ability to work.

The MSK community has worked with Public Health England and Business in the Community to develop this toolkit to support employers in reducing MSK related work loss. As the Alliance representing the musculoskeletal community in the UK, ARMA also supports enabling people to work despite MSK problems through its member organisations. The ultimate goal is to provide a workplace that takes preventative action, encourages early-intervention for any MSK problem and accommodates effective rehabilitation and return to work plans. An overarching principle is enabling people to help themselves – whether an employer or employee. Employees need to know how to look after their MSK health and work around any problems they have. This Toolkit shows how employers, small and large, can support this.

Employees can be enabled to have long productive working lives not unnecessarily limited by musculoskeletal problems if this approach is enabled in their workplace. A key message is the need for open discussion to avoid problems and to find solutions.



Peter Simpson

CEO Anglian Water, Chair Wellbeing at Work, Business in the Community

Employees are the lifeblood of every organisation. Their health and wellbeing is central to the sustainability of any business. We have a responsibility as business leaders and managers to provide the support they need to stay fit and well for as long as possible. A responsible employer knows that morally it is the right thing to do for people who may spend most of their working life with one organisation. But he also understands that it makes good business sense, for a healthy workforce will be more engaged and make a positive contribution to sustainable growth.

At Anglian Water, we have deep experience of working with our employees to embed practices that support physical and mental health across the organisation. Our Fit for the Future programme has transformed the way that we think about wellbeing in the workplace, with demonstrably positive outcomes.

The programme was borne out of the growing realisation that our workforce was getting older, in line with the population as a whole, and was becoming less able to cope with the physical demands of many aspects of the work that we do. The need to engage became critical to our business.

The success of Fit for the Future owes much to the fact that it was created and designed in partnership with our employees. Our organisation has enshrined Business in the Community's Workwell model, which encourages employers to adopt a proactive and holistic approach to wellbeing and can be adapted to help businesses develop a bespoke wellbeing strategy. Fit for the Future is an articulation of that vision.

Since the launch of Fitness for the Future we have seen a significant reduction in the number of working hours lost through ill health while enjoying improved in-work productivity as a consequence of innovation as well as having a more engaged and committed workforce.

Within the Workwell framework, we have given a high priority to musculoskeletal health as a key determinant of fitness for work. We know that injuries to the back and to upper and lower limbs are a major cause of sickness absence. As well as causing debilitating physical discomfort, there is a strong relationship between musculoskeletal health and mental health.

Continued overleaf

Peter Simpson (continued)

Supporting employees to maintain good musculoskeletal health through good diet and weight loss, for example, is just one aspect of our efforts. We have also made adjustments to working practices and invested in equipment and technology that can ease the physical burden on our employees, from devices that lift manhole covers to ergonomically designed cabins for our lorry drivers.

We work closely with our supply chain, not only to ensure that our employees benefit from equipment and resources that meet our MSK criteria, but also to share learnings that will help them support their own employees.

Anglian Water is proud to support this new Business in the Community/Public Health England guide to musculoskeletal health, which will become an invaluable resource for line managers. Like the Workwell model, it is rooted in the lived experiences of employers with a strong commitment to workplace health and wellbeing, and provides practical advice to support all employees. There is a strong focus on prevention, as well as guidance on helping people with MSK problems remain or return to work.

As you will see, best practice does not involve significant expense or workplace reorganisation. It is about taking small steps, and working together, to bring about positive change, to the benefit of all.

The business case for supporting MSK health in the workplace is compelling. Musculoskeletal (MSK) health is important to our quality of life as well as to the productivity and health of companies and wider society.

It is important for employers to adhere to their responsibility to take action; where MSKs are caused or made worse because of work there is a responsibility on the employer to address it through assessing the risk and reducing the risk as far as is reasonably practical.

Chronic musculoskeletal pain affects 100 million people in Europe and is widespread in the working age population, although it is undiagnosed in more than 40 per cent of cases.

Despite the growth of stress-related illness among workers, MSK disorders remain the single biggest cause of absence from work. It is estimated that up to two per cent of European gross domestic product is accounted for by the direct costs of MSK disorders each year. In the UK, MSK disorders, including back pain, joint injuries and repetitive strain injuries, cost society an estimated £7 billion a year.

It is, therefore, imperative that individuals, employers, the NHS and other health service providers work together to reduce the incidence of MSK disorders and build a culture which promotes MSK health as part of a holistic, integrated approach to health and wellbeing.

Employers must consult with their workforce on all health and safety matters, either individually or, if they recognise a trade union, through safety representatives.

There are risks of poor MSK health in all types of business – ergonomic issues can cause MSK problems in the manufacturing industry, while sedentary behaviour can cause poor MSK health in offices.



MSK problems represent a substantial cost to your business through:

- > Sick pay
- > Lost productivity
- > Loss of key skills
- > Retraining costs
- > Legal costs and injury benefit



This represents a significant opportunity for cost reduction, since:

- > MSK problems are manageable and can be prevented
- > litigation can be avoided as preventing MSK problems often is a health and safety requirement.

“Good employee health and good business are mutually dependent. But employers face a number of challenges in implementing action around health and wellbeing including MSKs. These include understanding the issues, knowing what works, for whom, and how and centrally, where to find this information and support. This guide brings together key elements needed to enable employers to identify and implement effective action which will improve the health of their workforce and their business.”

Mandy Wardle-McLeish FFPH, Associate
Director Public Health The Fit For Work Team

The moral case is equally significant
Employers owe a legal duty of care to their employees, which means that they should take all steps which are reasonably possible to ensure their health, safety and wellbeing. In addition, we know that there is a strong business case to support the workforce. But it is also the right thing to do. Today, the best employers recognise the need to go beyond legislated minimum standards, and adhere to the highest standards of corporate social responsibility.

Their strategic vision is about creating and supporting a sustainable community through a partnership of employer and employee. Increasingly, these high standards are held up as examples when the conduct of businesses comes under public and political scrutiny.

Work can have a positive impact on our health and wellbeing. It helps create a sense of purpose through the contribution we make to our families, and to society. We spend so much of our daily life in the workplace, and build important social networks around colleagues who share our successes and our disappointments. When we are unable to work through ill-health, or when work becomes difficult because of pain or disability, the challenge extends well beyond our daily work routine.

Back, neck, muscle and joint conditions are one of the most common reasons why employees need time off work, or are unable to fulfil their duties to the best of the abilities. Discomfort and pain can cause mental as well as physical distress. Often the condition becomes aggravated because an employee feels unable to discuss it openly with a line manager,

through embarrassment or fear of being penalised at work. Failure to address the complaint at an early stage can cause a more serious injury.

Responsible employers can help in a number of ways. They can make sure that the workplace is not only safe, but also designed to promote good musculoskeletal health. They can make adjustments to support employees who have MSK problems to help them remain at work. They can support an employee who is absent through ill-health to help them back to work.

Increasingly, responsible employers are taking a proactive approach by supporting employees to lead healthier lifestyles that will reduce the risk of MSK problems in later life. This may be by supporting employees to stop smoking, providing healthier snacks, or encouraging staff to spend more time away from their desks. These are some of the simple, inexpensive steps you can take towards creating a healthier workplace, in which conversations about issues like back pain and neck ache are easier to begin.

Business in the Community's Workwell Model

Business in the Community's evidence-based Workwell Model supports employers to take a strategic, proactive approach to wellbeing. It provides an ideal template to help embed a positive approach to good MSK health in the workplace.

The model demonstrates the benefits of action and provides practical support to help businesses develop a bespoke wellbeing strategy. The model is considered to be the gold standard by business, with many companies endorsing, adopting, and adapting the model to work with their business wellbeing approaches. It is not a one-size-fits-all; it is specifically designed to support the unique requirements of each business.



See next page for details on the Workwell Wheel

The Workwell wheel

The **outer magenta wheel** demonstrates the virtuous cycle of business benefits that result from promoting wellbeing. This section provides a compelling business case for business to adopt a strategic, proactive approach to wellbeing that is aligned to their core business objectives.

The **inner grey wheel** outlines the complementary employee-led element of the model. Demonstrating and supporting how employees can take action to support their own wellbeing and that of others, this element is based on the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework developed by the New Economics Foundation.

The five inner segments of the model cover the broad areas that businesses should address to create a culture of wellbeing, where employees can thrive. By taking action across all of these elements, businesses can create a comprehensive approach to wellbeing that drives business productivity and employee engagement:



Better physical and psychological health: Creating a safe and pleasant work environment by promoting a physically safe working environment and promoting healthy behaviours, both physical and mental. There is a clear link between good MSK health and mental health and wellbeing.



Better work: Creating a happy, engaging environment of good work, which is underpinned by good job design, autonomy, variety, employee voice, talent management, employment security, and a management style and culture that promotes mutual trust and respect. Working with employees to design and choose equipment that encourages best MSK practice, supported by appropriate training, can help to create a safe and harmonious working environment.



Better relationships: Promoting better communication both inside and outside the workplace, to ensure employees maintain the social capital they need for good mental health wellbeing. Engaging staff in developing solutions so the approach to MSK is co-produced together.



Better specialist support: Ensuring teams manage MSK health issues at work in a proactive way, and facilitate a more efficient return to work for those off work, by equipping specialist teams, line managers and all employees with information and skills to maintain their own health and support others.



Working well: Positioning employee wellbeing as a boardroom issue, including the importance of MSK health; creating a culture of wellbeing where employees feel trusted, respected, with a strategic proactive approach to wellbeing, underpinned by strong governance and reporting arrangements.



1/ Be prepared

Be prepared

“ Pretty much any adult you speak to has experienced a musculoskeletal problem some time in their life whether it be a sports injury, back pain from working in the garden, a “touch of arthritis” or a “dodgy knee”. Perhaps it is because these problems are so ubiquitous that they are not given the attention they deserve. There’s a lot of awareness about the impact of stress in the workplace but actually musculoskeletal conditions are the biggest cause of work absence.

There tends to have been an emphasis on health and safety preventing MSK injuries occurring in the workplace with a focus on manual handling training, work station assessments etc.

This is of course essential but the approach needs to be much broader, helping people to think about the risks they are exposed to in and outside the workplace, what they can do to maintain their MSK health and how to best to manage problems should they occur. I think this toolkit is an important resource for employers and employees and I hope it will encourage them to take a new look at MSK health and what everyone can do to protect it. ”

**Jo Erwin, Research Associate,
Bone & Joint Research Office**

Why MSK health matters

- > MSK health gives people mobility and dexterity and is essential for all kinds of work. Many people have MSK problems that arose independently of work or as a result of previous work related injuries but may affect their current ability to work. They are the greatest cause of disability in the UK and globally.
- > MSK problems affect work through impact on physical function by causing pain, stiffness, limitation of movement/mobility. These problems become more common as people get older when many will face not just this but several other health problems.
- > Work that is unsafe or provides inadequate training and support for staff to do their job without injury can lead to MSK problems through both acute injury or repetitive strain.
- > Work that is physically demanding and/ or with high levels of stress impact on the person’s health, their ability to work at their most productive and are associated with high levels of work loss.
- > MSK and mental health problems are the greatest causes of work loss and are often interrelated. Chronic disabling pain and ongoing MSK problems can be associated with depression and/or stress, leading to increased absence from work.

Definitions

The simplest, non-clinical way to describe musculoskeletal health is the working of joints and muscles, and the ability to perform comfortably the physical tasks of daily living.

Symptoms of an MSK problem can be attributed to a specific cause – a **musculoskeletal condition** or **musculoskeletal disease**. But sometimes the precise cause remains unclear and then it is described as a **musculoskeletal problem**.

Most episodes of back pain have no clear cause. If the problem is associated with occupation it is often called a **musculoskeletal disorder (MSD)**.

MSK conditions are a diverse group of conditions that affect the musculoskeletal system: bones, joints, muscles, tendons and the tissues that connect them.

There are a range of causes, including inflammatory diseases, ageing, injuries, congenital and developmental. They may be acute and short-lived such as following an injury. Some can be recurrent such as episodes of back pain. Some are long-term and progressive. The common factor is that they are associated with pain and impaired physical function.

MSK conditions include:



Joint conditions: osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis, gout, ankylosing spondylitis



Bone conditions: osteoporosis and associated fragility fractures



Spinal disorders: neck pain, low back pain, prolapsed disc and sciatica



Regional and widespread pain disorders: frozen shoulder, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia



Musculoskeletal injuries: strains and sprains often related to occupation or sports; high-energy limb and spinal fractures such as road injuries



Genetic, congenital and developmental childhood disorders: club foot and scoliosis



Multisystem inflammatory diseases which commonly have musculoskeletal manifestations such as connective tissue diseases and vasculitis: systemic lupus erythematosus

Impact of MSK health on work

MSK problems commonly affect people's ability to work, by causing them to be less productive, although still in work (presenteeism); to take sick leave, often for long periods (absenteeism); or to leave the workplace prematurely (work disabled)

Work disabled

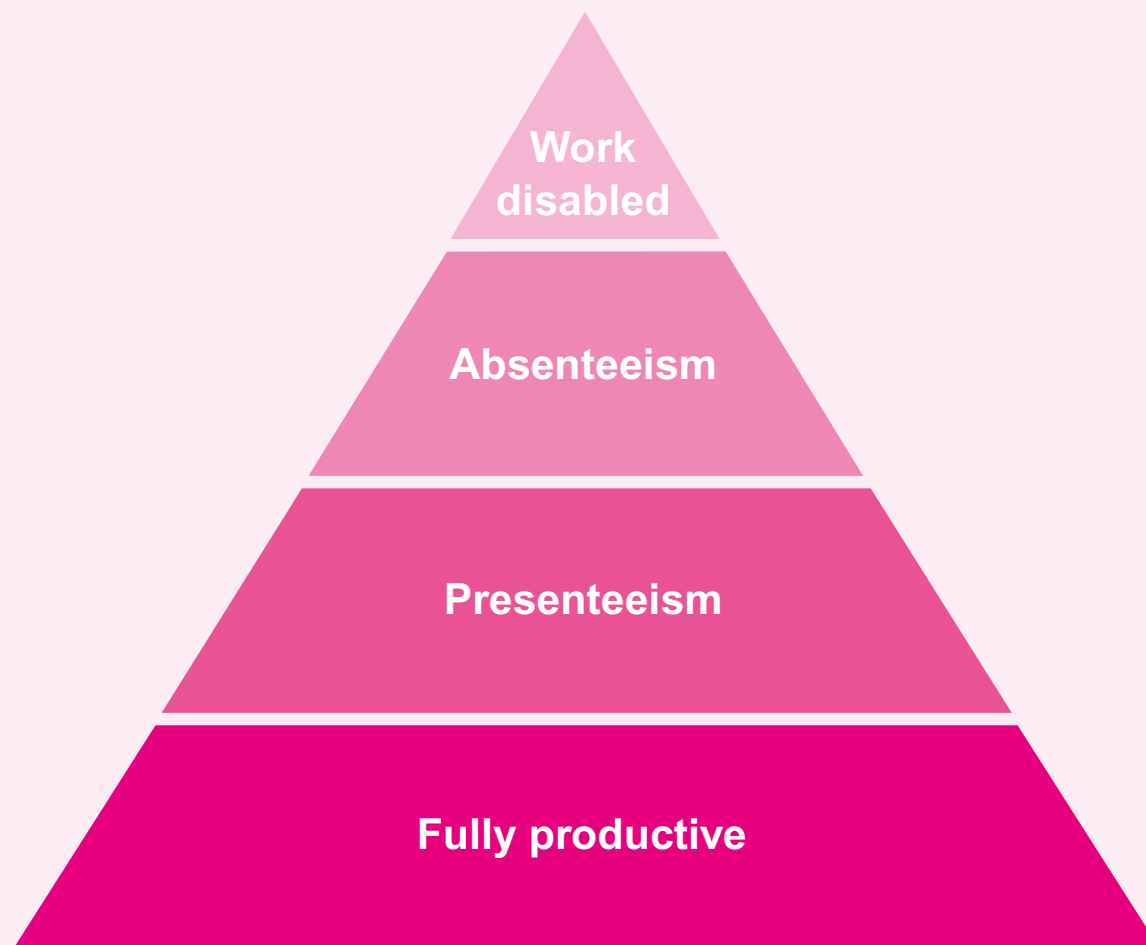
Outcome: Leaving work before retirement age. Only 47.9% of working age people with a disability are in employment

Absenteeism

Outcome: Enforced absence from work. 4.4 days of work are lost per person per year to sickness absence each year (131 million days overall) with around 31 million of these attributable to MSK problems

Presenteeism

Outcome: In work but with difficulty or reduced efficiency/productivity. 39% of public sector workers and 26% of private sector workers have experienced presenteeism in their workplace, according to the ONS



MSK and mental health

There is a clear link between MSK problems, mental health and work loss. MSK problems cause pain, loss of mobility and dexterity, and limitation of activities. This can lead to a loss of confidence and fears about the future. Stress also often manifests itself as MSK pain.

Employees with MSK problems are at higher risk of stress, anxiety and depression. A recent study found that 33.9% of older adults (over 50) with MSK pain also have persistent anxiety issues and 22% have a persistent depression problem. Employees are often anxious about the future if they do not know how long-term any problem may be and how much it will impact on their ability to work.

Mental health also has an impact on a person's ability to deal with an MSK problem. A person with depression may take longer to recover from back pain, and will require more time off work.

This is why an employer looking to reduce the burden of MSK problems at work should also support practices to improve mental health and wellbeing. The Business in the Community Mental Health for Employers Toolkit gives guidance and both toolkits should be used in conjunction to deal with the two greatest causes of work loss.

It is also important for employees to understand and recognise that dealing with an MSK problem may require support for their mental health. This is not to say that MSK pain is unreal or psychosomatic. But the close link between good MSK health and good mental health means that both should be taken into account.

The first step is to ensure that the health and wellbeing are embedded into organisational culture. Strong leadership is crucial. The second step is to enable open conversations about any background factors that may be affecting the impact of the MSK problem on the employee, whether in or outside work. Using HSE's stress management resources* can be helpful for employers to approach this type of conversation.

We provide useful resources to support your response to mental health issues in addition to MSK problems in this toolkit.

Open communication is essential
An open, positive culture should be central to your approach to MSK problems. A workplace with a positive culture enables an employee to look after their own MSK health, receive early treatment and support, and continue to work even if they have some limitations.

Importantly, it enables open conversations and avoids employees feeling isolated and worried about their physical and mental health. It involves listening and responding where possible.

Open communication is encouraged in the workplace if all employees feel assured they will be listened to and action will be taken. Management and other colleagues should not dismiss an employee's disclosure and be a welcoming listener to whatever they have to say – many problems are overlooked simply because a manager or other colleague has no experience of what an employee is talking about. This kind of negative culture should be actively stamped out and employees assured that they will be listened to. If management deems it appropriate to take no action then transparency is essential – employees should be given a full justification regarding the decision and have the opportunity to feedback if they are dissatisfied with the decision.

'Toolbox Talks' are an example of a sector specific strategy to encourage conversations around reducing risks in the working environment. The construction industry encourages employees – at all levels – to come together as they usually do during their breaks and allow some time for health and safety conversations. Concerns can be easily raised and discussed. Conversations in your workplace around general MSK health, existing MSK problems and risks to MSK health can be discussed in a similar way. Please see the **resources** at the end of this chapter for how this scheme was implemented.



Click here to read more on how this scheme was implemented in the construction industry

An open culture should be led from the top, with a clear signal from senior management that the organisation cares about the wellbeing of all employees, at all levels. Here are some practical steps that you can take:



Appoint a champion for wellbeing and MSK health. They provide a focus for activities to achieve and maintain a positive culture as well as acting as a link with occupational health or line managers.



Encourage and support your health and safety lead to talk about MSK issues and encourage workplace risk assessments to prevent avoidable injury and harm.



Work with staff to develop your approach, so that there is a clear sense of collaboration and co-development with employees. Ask staff to generate ideas and support them to implement them.



Have a space, whether it is online or a noticeboard in the kitchen, where staff can share news or events. This can change the social dynamics in the workplace.



Work with others. If you are a small business, share ideas and activities with others through trade organisations. If you are a larger business, maybe organise events yourself. Collaborate with local colleges, universities or services (health or leisure).



If feasible, consider offering discount places on health enhancing activities such as yoga or swimming for employees to take part in, or introduce loyalty schemes with internal or external leisure programmes.

Case study: Suffering in silence

“...I found a booklet here last year on one of my appointments at the [rheumatology] clinic. A book you can actually take into work and give your employer. But then I think, well, how do you go about it? It’s like something that you are presenting to them saying well “just in case”. I’m not sure – am I highlighting my disability to them, is that looking good on my part, is that indicating that I’m fragile? Do I want them to think that? It’s difficult. It’s a difficult thing to broach.”

An employee with rheumatoid arthritis

Beginning the conversation
Knowing where to start can seem daunting. Having that first conversation with employees about MSK health might appear to be the biggest obstacle. The chances are that some of the building blocks are already in place.

Employers should already be actively talking about health and safety, and many workplaces may have wellbeing initiatives. If employers are not already talking about prevention and self-care around MSK through these channels, they should use these existing platforms to broaden their approach to MSK. Some of these channels may be promoted by employers, others are organised informally by staff.

Self-help groups to encourage colleagues to smoke less and lunchtime runs are just two examples. You may also find that employees already talk about their experiences of MSK problems among themselves, and may even have devised informal ways to adapt their work to cope, even if this hasn't been shared with a line manager.

The term musculoskeletal health, or even the shortened version MSK, can be off putting. But most employees will have some experience of back pain, a pulled muscle or torn ligaments.

There is bound to be enthusiasm among employees for an initiative that is designed to make their working lives easier. This is an investment in them and in the equipment and processes that they use every day. Get them involved. Ask them to flag up issues of concern and to put forward solutions. Keep them informed as initiatives take shape.



See the following page for ideas to get the ball rolling

Look for quick wins and simple things to get the ball rolling:



Consider win-win partnerships with external resources and organisations. They want to support your wellbeing activities. Businesses with health-related products and services are often an untapped goldmine of resources.



Link your wellbeing activities to national awareness days. This is a great way to raise awareness without seeming overbearing or interfering to your employees. Events are often supported by organisations willing to help you raise awareness, with marketing packs, posters and handouts. These will contain up-to-date information designed by experts in engaging people, and will give you ideas on how to raise a serious subject in a more accessible or fun way.



A wellbeing survey can help identify MSK problems, providing some immediate feedback so you can start improving straight away. Offer incentives that will encourage staff to take part in the survey.



Encourage office employees to move more during their working day: fit some standing desks, encourage walking meetings, organise a step challenge.



Harness your workforce. Engage and empower your employees to become wellbeing champions, with a particular focus on MSK health.



Signpost employees to sources of information and support. Create wall posters and/or use the organisation's intranet or email.



Encourage your senior leadership to become involved.

***“Workplace health is a complex issue and as our workforces age, and have increasingly sedentary lifestyles, employers need to do more to ensure that they can keep their employees productive and in work. We know that mental health is one of the main reasons for absence, but absence due to musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions is on a par, with too many working days still lost due to back, joint and shoulder pain.*”**

Prevention is half the battle. Giving employees and managers the right tools and information to prevent and manage MSK conditions when they occur is vital, resulting in reductions in absence days lost, and most importantly for business, improved productivity and retention. And when problems do arise a swift and responsive set of early and appropriate interventions will help to ensure that employees can return to work swiftly and remain part of the team. But knowing what works, and in what environment, is a challenge for business owners and managers. A simple toolkit, with a framework for action in terms of prevention, the management and rehabilitation of MSK conditions can help employers of all sizes to identify the most appropriate and evidence based interventions in one place.”

Jane Abraham, DWP Policy Fellow

Checklist



- Do you recognise that MSK health is important to your workplace and employees?
- Have you pro-actively considered workplace MSK risks as part of your Health and Safety risk assessment approach?
- Have you empowered staff around health and safety awareness and their rights and responsibilities to address risks?
- Have you communicated to staff that you recognise the importance of MSK health?
- Have you asked staff about MSK problems and solutions?
- Have you measured the extent and nature of any MSK problems?
- Are you ready to build your approach?
- Have you established how you will engage staff to co-produce the approach to MSK in the workplace?

Useful resources



HSE statistics on work-related MSK problems:

[Click here to read the statistics](#)

Interventions by businesses to prevent MSK problems, and direct savings made:

[Click here to find out more](#)

Examples implemented by SMEs to help reduce the risk of MSK problems in the workplace:

[Click here to read examples](#)

Examples of reasonable adjustments aligned with specific responsibilities:

[Click here to find out more](#)

HSE's tool for 'Calculating the costs and benefits of an MSD case management service':

[Click here for HSE's tool](#)



2/ Managing MSK

Managing MSK health

“ This toolkit provides an opportunity for employers to think about how they can work more effectively with both their employees and healthcare professionals in supporting employees stay in and return to work with MSK conditions. Very often these are long-term fluctuating conditions that can benefit from ongoing support and advice. Early intervention is central to a good outcome for both employer and employee. The line manager employee relationship is key to achieving this goal and shouldn't be underestimated. ”

Professor Debbie Cohen, Director of Psychosocial Research, Occupational and Physician Health, School of Medicine, Cardiff University

Prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation

MSK health gives people mobility and dexterity and is essential for all kinds of work. Many people have musculoskeletal problems that affect their ability to work. They are the greatest cause of disability in the UK and globally. MSK problems are more common as people get older when many will face not just this but several other health problems.

Employers need to take a pro-active approach to reducing risks that may result in MSK problems but also to help employees with MSK problems – whether they are short-term or long-term condition – to enable them to have full working life.

The ultimate goal is to provide a workplace that takes preventative action, encourages early intervention for any MSK problem and accommodates effective rehabilitation and return to work plans.

Prevention

- Optimise physical health
- Avoid risks and hazards
- Open dialogue with line managers, occupational health and H&S
- Early identification of physical capability problems of employees

Early intervention

- Early intervention if work is compromised by or aggravates MSK problems
- Reasonable adjustments to work

Rehabilitation & return to work

- Rehabilitation programmes
- Return to work programmes
- Self management

Understanding MSK needs

Where MSKs are caused or made worse because of work there is a responsibility on the employer to address it through assessing the risk and reducing the risk as far as is reasonably practical.

You need to understand the MSK needs of your workplace and of your employees.

To be able to provide the right support to your employees to enable them to avoid MSK problems and to continue to work, you must understand your employees' challenges in work.

These include:

- > **The characteristics of work** (physical and mental demands, shift patterns, variations in workload)
- > **The characteristics of the workforce** (age spectrum, experience, gender, fitness, mixture of skills and expertise, staff shortages)
- > **Their MSK problems**

Use sickness records, staff surveys and appraisals, and hold regular, informal meetings with groups of employees, to improve your understanding of the dynamics of the workplace.

Ask “How are you?”, “Do you have any health problems that affect you, such as pain, stiffness or stress?”, “Can you do all the physical roles you need to without difficulty?”, “If you have difficulties, how can we help you work around them?”. This is particularly important information for the return to work process.

Then develop a plan that considers prevention, early intervention and rehabilitation and return to work.

“Hotdesking can be resolved and people can be trained. Stress and lack of movement is the issue. We are not designed to be stuck in one position all day. There’s a lack of movement, we’re fixed to a computer screen, stressed, holding our shoulders wrong.”

Voice of employee

“We come into contact with a number of businesses in our region and have found that many do not have the same focus on staff wellbeing. I hope that this toolkit will provide support for such businesses enabling them to fill the current gap in terms of advice, guidance and practical, targeted actions that they can take to improve the health and well-being of their workforce.”

Pamela Avornyo, Learning and Development Manager, Sitel Newcastle

What can go wrong?

The most common problems are aches and pains affecting different parts of the body. Back pain is the most frequent complaint, accounting for 2.5 million visits to the GP a year. Most of these problems are not long-term and can be effectively managed if advice is sought early on. However, they still have a significant impact on what people can do – including at work.

These problems can turn into recurring problems where pain returns to the affected areas more and more frequently. Raising awareness of this among employees and encouraging early reporting is an essential step. Recurrent conditions – such as rheumatoid arthritis – are long-term and can have the greatest impact.

Fortunately, they are less common but their chronic nature can inhibit an employee's working life and comfort at work for long periods of time. If an employee has a diagnosis of a chronic condition, then awareness – at least at management level – is very important. Information regarding the condition can be obtained from the employee's GP and provide some understanding on how an employee may be affected.

Being open about the condition will really help an employee get the help they need and be included and valued in your business. Encouraging openness and having a positive culture towards openness is a key action to achieve in the workplace. Promoting MSK health can support an employee's management of a long-term health condition. Having good MSK health enables regular physical activity, which in turn can decrease suffering from depression and anxiety, and increase wellbeing for people suffering some health conditions.

Employees should be made aware that employers cannot take action to help make reasonable adjustments or prevent any workplace harm if they are not aware of someone's MSK problem. Make employees aware that you encourage early reporting at work and suggest they seek healthcare advice as soon as possible.

Prevention

The primary responsibility on prevention lies with the employer, which is why risk management and assessment processes are critical when managing MSK health in the workplace. Invest in the MSK health of your employees. Investing in people's physical capacity will enable them to have full working lives.

This includes:



Preventing accidents and injuries



Reducing workplace risk through health and safety



Increasing physical activity



Improving diets, enabling people to achieve an ideal body weight



Encouraging employees to stop smoking and reduce alcohol consumption



Reducing stress



Worker consultation. Employers are obliged to consult with staff (this should involve union safety representatives where feasible)

For employers the most important aspect of prevention is reducing workplace risks and hazards, but supporting staff to reduce their lifestyle risk factors will help reduce risk of MSK harm at home as well as work.

The risk factors for poor MSK health are similar to those for heart disease, respiratory problems, diabetes and cancer. So, investment in general health and wellbeing will help to address other health issues in the workplace. Encourage and support health in the workplace.

Avoid hazards and risks



- ✓ **Ensure** there is an optimum match between an employee's capabilities and job demands.
- ✓ **Equip** employees with the necessary skills to cope with the demands of their job, through training and other support.
- ✓ **Encourage** employees to place a high value on health and safety at work.
- ✓ **Understand the law** for example, obligations relating to risk assessment and safety committee regulations.



Click here to read 'Understanding the law'

Consider what the main risks to MSK health are in your working environment, based on the roles, the tasks and the nature of your workforce:

- > Employee tasks (including visual display users, manual lifting, repetitive movement of certain body parts).
- > Length of working day and break down of employee tasks within a working day.
- > Work setting (e.g. office, warehouse, transport cabin – car, train, aircraft etc., mechanical factory, handwork factory).

"I'm at a desk which is set up for me and my employer has helped a lot. It's helpful that my manager has a back problem also."

Employee beneficiary of MSK adjustments

Early identification of physical capability problems of employees

Conversations between employees and their managers should identify when there is a physical capability issue.

A survey by Arthritis Research UK in 2016

found that people 'put up and shut up' when it comes to workplace health. Over 2,000 people were questioned about their attitudes and experience regarding health and the workplace and results showed that:

- > **1 in 5 (20%)** of people are worried they won't be fit enough to continue working in the next year.
- > **A third of people (33%)** with a long-term condition felt their colleagues don't understand the impact of their condition.
- > **39%** don't feel confident discussing their workplace health with their employer.
- > **Over 1 in 7 (15%)** wouldn't disclose a long-term health condition such as arthritis or recurrent joint pain to their employer.

Early intervention

The sooner a MSK problem is managed, the less likely there will be long-term work loss.

Often simple measures can be taken to enable the employee to continue to work. This means enabling and encouraging employees to talk about a MSK problem as soon as it arises.

“I have a new chair, an ergonomic mouse, special keyboard, riser, voice recognition software and adjustable desk.”

Employee beneficiary of MSK adjustments

Reasonable adjustments can be made to their work and professional support encouraged and enabled if the problem is having a significant impact on their health and work. Many MSK problems are short-term and will resolve with this approach and with time.

Management of MSK problems requires a joined-up approach that involves the employee, their healthcare team, and their line manager. The focus must be on helping them to return or stay at work, working within their abilities. The approach must address physical, psychological, social and occupational factors and not just treat their condition with the assumption that this will enable them to work.

Physical barriers are the practical challenges associated with undertaking work-related activities when someone has a painful and limiting condition.

The psychological barriers are associated with acceptance of having a limiting condition and the need to work around it, frustration and fear around not fulfilling work tasks, anxiety and low mood as a result of pain, fear of the future, and concern that continuing to work may cause more problems and long-term damage.

The Fit Note is an important document to assist with overcoming these barriers and to ensure that you take the correct action. The process needs transparency and for the employee to be honest – both to their GP and their employer – regarding their MSK problem, how they feel and what can be improved at work to help. The employer can help to encourage these important conversations by being proactive in the Fit Note process and responsive to recommendations that GPs make.



Click to read ACAS guidance on how to have difficult conversations and how to manage them

Adjustments in the workplace
Most employees with an MSK problem are able to continue in work, providing there is some allowance for their problem. Continuing in work within their abilities will not cause more damage or a worse health outcome in the long-term.

In general, being in work is good for mental and physical health. As an employer, you are legally obliged to provide adjustments that are deemed necessary and feasible by a healthcare provider. Please see the relevant information and links in the 'Understand the Law' box for a more detailed understanding of these legal requirements.

Employees do not want to keep saying they cannot do something. Co-workers and line managers need to understand this, pre-empt difficulties the worker may have to complete a task, and avoid making unrealistic demands.

Rehabilitation and return to work

Some MSK problems will be long-term or recurrent and then rehabilitation and a return to work programme is needed.

The support you can offer your employees to enable them to stay in work depends on the nature of their problem and what is feasible for your business. Support can be provided directly by you but there is also much support available from the public and voluntary sectors.

Persistent and chronic MSK problems affect an employee throughout their daily routine, not only at work. They find ways to work around their MSK problem when they are in their own environment. But they are not always given that opportunity in the workplace.

Small changes can be effective in enabling them to work despite their condition, such as finding adaptive ways to complete a task, shortening the time spent on a task, rotating their tasks with colleagues and having short breaks.

Their needs will become clearer through good communication. Their ability to find solutions can also be supported by advice that is available from the public and voluntary sectors.

Employees with short-to medium-term conditions or problems that arise intermittently can benefit from similar adjustments. These also act as an important mechanism for prevention, and to prevent recurrence or deterioration.

Self-management

Helping employees to manage their own health problems, or self-management, is an important approach to be used in conjunction with any support provided by the employer or healthcare professionals.

Self-management can include the employee describing which actions at work help with the management of their condition, and how adaptive work adjustments – such as short breaks, role rotation or a safe zone for the employee to perform helpful condition management movements or stretches – can make a difference. It can also include being aware of overall general health and levels of physical activity, finding strategies to manage pain and fatigue, learning how to communicate with friends, family and work colleagues to increase their understanding of the physical and psycho-social impact of the condition, and feeling supported to have work time appointments to encourage communicating more effectively with medical professionals.

Self-management can also include setting goals to achieve changes in behaviour that may help their symptoms and quality of life.

Self-management behaviours develop over time and are a product of the experience of living with the condition.

Self-management can also be taught and there are a number of courses suitable for people with MSK problems that are delivered face-to-face or online.

You need to:



Know what support your employees need



Signpost employees to knowledge and support that will enable them to manage their conditions



Provide reasonable adjustment and adaptation



Provide individual support related to their specific problem which helps employees to work to their potential

“No one should be working through their lunch break. Everyone should have a half hour break if they work a full day but in reality everyone works through their lunch hour.”

Voice of employee

Understanding the law



Employers have a legal obligation to protect the health and safety of their employees and other people who might be affected by what they do. Some health and safety regulations are particularly relevant to dealing with MSK issues in the workplace:

- ✓ Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 regulation 3 requires that all employers assess the risks to the health and safety of their employees while they are at work.
- ✓ Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 as amended (DSE Regulations). Some users of visual display units may get aches and pains, including back pain. The regulations set out what employers need to do if their employees are habitual users of DSE.
- ✓ Reasonable Adjustments part of the Equality Act 2010: employers need to provide adjusted working conditions to aid employees with a disability or medically reported health problem – as deemed feasible and possible by a healthcare professional
- ✓ Equality Act 2010: Employers are obliged to provide equal opportunities and protect from discrimination
- ✓ Control of Vibration at Work Regulations 2005: regular long-term exposure to Whole Body Vibration (WBV) is associated with back pain. The regulations require an employer to take actions to protect persons against risk to their health and safety arising from exposure to vibration at work. More information can be found at the HSE's vibration website.
- ✓ Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) (MHOR) require an employer to carry out a risk assessment on the manual handling tasks that pose a risk of injury.



[Click here for more information on the Equality Act 2010](#)



[Click here for more information on Control of Vibration at Work](#)

Potential grants

You may be entitled to grants from your local authority to aid the implementation of any reasonable adjustments.

Additionally, the Department for Work and Pensions has a Fit for Work initiative, which can help shape your strategy to keep an employee with an MSK issue in work.



[Click here to read all guidance on the Fit for Work initiative](#)

“We swap around; managing ourselves comes into it and boredom as well. Everyone’s trained so we can swap around.”

Voice of employee

Resources

You can help employees by signposting the best support available for MSK problems provided by the NHS, Public Health England, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy and the voluntary sector.

The NHS has video exercise guides for different parts of the body, which can raise awareness of preventative behaviours, both in and out of work. Almost everyone has low back pain at some time so it is worth getting everyone engaged.

“I sit down all day at a computer, sometimes I get up and feel very stiff. It’s a problem, the amount of time you have to spend sitting down.”

Voice of employee

NHS Guides



Back exercises:

[Click here to watch exercise video](#)

Healthy backs at work:

[Click here to read the guide](#)

Shoulder exercises:

[Click here to watch exercise video](#)

Knee exercises (please note: not only for runners as specified):

[Click here to read the exercises](#)

Thigh stretches:

[Click here to watch exercise video](#)

Hamstring stretches:

[Click here to watch exercise video](#)

Pilates for beginners:

[Click here to watch exercise video](#)

Additionally, the NHS Inform web tool provides information on how to manage minor injuries in specific areas, exercises for pain in specific areas, as well as stories from those suffering from MSK pain.

[Click here to read the web tool](#)

See also the resources section at the end of this toolkit for a detailed list of resources to assist with living with MSK issues and managing pain, and some specific HSE resources for safety and adaptations.

Checklist



- Do you know the risks to MSK health in your workplace and the problems employees encounter?
- Are the roles and responsibilities of individuals or groups in your business to enable an employee to stay in work clearly defined?
- Do you encourage and support open conversations to enable early reporting and solution-finding that enable employees to stay in work?
- Do you encourage and support self-management?
- Do you know how to access occupational health services?
- Do you know which external resources you can use to support employees to stay in work (i.e. government grants to aid reasonable adjustments)?
- Is support for MSK problems signposted to all your employees?
- Do you review individual needs and make reasonable adjustments and adaptations to their work?
- Do you support their physical and mental health?



3/ Knowledge & training

Knowledge and training

“*Musculoskeletal health issues are known to impact on mental health and vice versa. The connection between the two is both complex and reciprocal. Probably the most common mental health symptom that affects musculoskeletal health is stress. When a person is stressed there is increased activation of the body’s pain system. For example, there is a common association between being stressed and pain around the neck.*”

Stress may be caused by workplace pressures or may be caused by issues outside of work. In either case, if the underlying issues result in greater physical demands on the body then the risk of an adverse impact on MSK health is amplified because stress can compromise the body’s normal support system that helps an individual to cope with increased physical demands.

Education to recognise the link between mental health issues and musculoskeletal health is a good approach to helping staff to recognise that they should seek help, either from their line manager or by referral to occupational health resources or by seeing their GP. Education will help those affected to see that an understanding of what is causing pain and establishing control over the symptoms will help with associated mental health issues.

Training of line managers to also recognise the link will encourage early referral and afford the opportunity to consider stress relieving actions and may highlight the need for the adoption of mindfulness techniques. A good manager should be proactive and clearly ask their staff whether they have any problems and if they are comfortable in carrying out their daily work – whether it be regarding the time spent on tasks or the tasks themselves.

Organisations need to ensure their MSK and mental health services complement each other and can be delivered in a co-ordinated way. It is important to understand the relationship between mental health and musculoskeletal health and where possible try to deal with both symptoms together.”

Dr Steve Boorman, Empactis

Knowledge and training are needed so that:



✓ Managers:

- Are aware of and understand health and wellbeing messages, including the importance of MSK health
- Understand the risk factors for MSK, including equipment and processes
- Are aware of their health and safety responsibilities, especially in the context of MSK
- Know how to support employees
- Understand the organisation's health and safety protocols, risk assessment tools and support available

✓ Employees:

- Understand MSK health
- Understand the risk factors, including equipment and processes
- Know how to help themselves

✓ The links between MSK health and mental health are understood

✓ There is good open communication

✓ The needs of the employees and workplace are met

✓ Training, training materials and supporting information are readily available

“We’re not allowed to stretch or bend over; if we see others doing that we say it is not allowed. We have to listen to the management, they watch from the windows and report us to the team leader if we are seen exercising.”

Voice of employee

Line managers have a crucial role to play. Their knowledge and commitment will be the foundation of your organisation's initiatives to promote MSK health.

By understanding the importance of MSK health line managers can:

- > **Ensure** there is an optimum match between an employee's capabilities and job demands.
- > **Equip** employees with the necessary skills to cope with the demands of their job, through training and other support
- > **Encourage** employees to place a high value on health and safety at work

Help employees to understand the potential benefits of training to support MSK health as part of their overall health and wellbeing.

Some may feel that it is not an employer's role to give lifestyle advice. So, training should be designed to meet their practical needs with reference to some specific areas of practice in the workplace that may impact on the employees' health and welfare and made easily accessible. Consult as widely as possible on their priorities and interests.

"If your peers don't take breaks the culture makes it difficult for you to take a break."

Voice of employee

Training can focus on:



Promoting their own health by understanding and following a healthy lifestyle, including exercise and diet.



Understanding of their legal responsibilities in relation to health and safety and MSK work related risk.



Avoiding risks to MSK health.



Positive attitude about work, and staying in work or returning to work despite an MSK problem.



Identifying and arranging their own adjustments or do so working with fellow employees. There may be a role for training workers and co-workers to facilitate the adjustments process.

Training should aim to enable staff to do their jobs in a safe and sustainable way, minimising risks to their health.

- All staff (managers and workers) need to be aware of the risks associated with any tasks. It is not just about equipment or policies. It is also about giving people the ability to look after their own health and provide an environment that enables this.
- Training must be specific to the types of activities conducted in the work environment.
- Follow-up supervision is crucial to ensure that techniques and practices learnt in training are continuously applied.
- There must be a system in place to manage the training and education requirements of staff and to ensure that their training is kept up to date.

“It’s habit; you’ve done it for so long. The production environment is to get things done as fast as possible; we need to change perceptions to get things done in regard to long-term health.”

Voice of employee

Things to consider



Some principles to be considered when designing manual handling training programmes:

1. The implementation of the skills taught at training must be supported and supervised in the workplace.
2. Staff will need to be instructed on safe techniques and use of the equipment through formal and on-the-job training.
3. Training may need to be tailored so that any problems of the individual worker are considered to ensure their abilities match the tasks.
4. Training needs to be focused on problem-solving skills as well as practical skills.

“Display Screen Equipment advice (DSE) says get up and move once an hour. You should not be asked where you are going.”

Voice of employee

Training will be determined by the nature of your business.

Consider what the main risks to MSK health are in your working environment, based on the roles, the tasks and the nature of your workforce:

- ☑ Employee tasks (including visual display users, manual lifting, repetitive movement of certain body parts).
- ☑ Length of working day and break down of employee tasks within a working day.
- ☑ Work setting (e.g. office, warehouse, transport cabin – car, train, aircraft etc., mechanical factory, handwork factory).

As we know, the MSK problems experienced by your workforce will be closely tied to their mental health. So, it is important to synchronise the training you provide to support this.

Expert views

“If we get stressed at work physiological changes occur in our body such as the tightening of our muscles, increased heart rate and raised blood pressure. At the same time our behaviour is also likely to change where we may not think about our posture or take the necessary breaks. Conversely a physical injury may result in us feeling depressed or despondent. So together mental and physical stresses may both lead to a variety of physical and behavioural responses that might place us at risk of developing a musculoskeletal disorder, especially if we are exposed to these risks over a significant length of time”

Katherine Roberts, Clinical Director,
Working-Health|Bevan Wilson

“Depression is four times more common for those in persistent pain than in those without such pain; while psychological distress, depression and anxiety worsen pain. Persistent low mood will have a deteriorating effect on day to day performance. Severity of symptoms varies but the concern is that a vicious cycle can develop with ever worsening pain and low mood leading to social withdrawal and a progressive reduction in the effectiveness of the staff member”

Dr Steve Boorman, Empactis

Training in communications should aim to form a workforce that openly speaks about risk, their own health and listens to other workers.

Make sure your employees know and understand the communication process:

- > Who should they talk to?
- > What happens when a risk or specific MSK issue is reported?
- > Is there an opportunity to give feedback on any action that was taken?

This is particularly important for line managers and those in a position of responsibility for others:

- > Be approachable
- > Be clear about the support that can be offered (e.g. task rotation, reduced hours, support from colleague)
- > Be clear about any actions that were taken and why they were justified
- > Stay in touch with employees on sick leave. Even providing an update on workplace news can make an employee feel included and valued.

Training must meet the needs of the organisation and of the workforce. Good feedback is needed. It also needs to improve practice, not just increase knowledge. An appraisal to show the impact of training is also needed.

The appraisal needs to be formative with feedback on how to make real improvements, rather than just highlighting what people do not know.

“Managers need to understand that even without a medical condition, Health and Safety says that for display equipment you must take a break every hour, work, stretch, and do a little exercise.”

Voice of employee

“Managers with more knowledge would be able to say ‘you’re not sitting right’ and prevent problems.”

Voice of employee

Checklist



- Is training on MSK health (as part of an overall health and wellbeing programme) for managers incorporated into your strategy?
- Is training on MSK health (as part of an overall health and wellbeing programme) for employees incorporated into your strategy?
- Does training include the link between MSK health and mental health?
- Does training include communication skills?
- Is training implemented?
- Is there feedback to ensure training meets needs?
- Is training evidenced?
- Do employees know where to find information?

Useful resources



Mental Health toolkit for employers

 [Click here to read the toolkit](#)

Mental Health First Aid Manager's Resource

 [Click here to download the guide](#)

Rethink Mental Illness Training Courses

 [Click here for Training Courses](#)

MIND resources

 [Click here for MIND Resources](#)

HSE tool to help assess line managers' abilities in dealing with stress related issues:

 [Click here for more information about the HSE Tool](#)

"It can be empowering to the manager to be able to help the member of staff and allows the member of staff to take action themselves."

Voice of employee

4/ Going further

Going further is all about becoming an ambassador for MSK health as a business. Sharing your stories can help other businesses provide support for their employees, and by being part of a community you can learn what others are doing, to support the continued development of your own approach to MSK health.

Use your supply chain

Your supply chain can provide a route to becoming a leader in MSK health and employment. Offering support and making your actions inclusive to smaller businesses in your supply chain can make a big difference. Furthermore, this can only improve your relationship with these businesses and help them become part of a wider community with a proactive, communicative and positive culture.

Use business organisations

Your trade organisation and local chamber of commerce will be eager to learn from your experience and to share with other members. They may also be able to connect you with businesses and organisations that are further ahead on the journey to good MSK health, and able to give advice and guidance.

Tell your story

Use press releases and blogs to tell a wider audience about your organisation's commitment to MSK health, and to celebrate your milestones. Promote your initiatives through thought leadership in trade press, specialist journals and relevant social media.

The following news blog on MSK health developments may be something you find interesting:



**Click here to read
the MSK news blog**

Resources for employers



Business and workplace examples:

HSE statistics on work-related MSK problems

www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/musculoskeletal/msd.pdf

Interventions by businesses to prevent MSK problems, and direct savings made

www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrpdf/rr491.pdf

Examples implemented by SMEs to help reduce the risk of MSK problems in the workplace

www.hse.gov.uk/business/sme-case-studies.htm

Examples of reasonable adjustments aligned with specific responsibilities

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/multipage-guide/reasonable-adjustments-practice

HSE's tool for 'Calculating the costs and benefits of an MSD case management service'

www.hse.gov.uk/msd/backpain/employers/costbenefiteg.htm

NHS support:

NHS 'One You' campaign – resources for individuals to improve their health and wellbeing

www.nhs.uk/oneyou

NHS Choices (which can provide MSK support)

www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx

Key legislation:

Equality Act 2010

www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance

Understand your obligations and definitions of different types of disability, guidance provided by The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/guidance-employers

Health and Safety Act 1974

www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.htm

Fit-for-work guidance

www.gov.uk/government/collections/fit-for-work-guidance

Government guidance on reasonable adjustment

www.gov.uk/reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-workers

Mental Health Resources:

Mental Health toolkit for employers

<http://wellbeing.bitc.org.uk/all-resources/toolkits/mental-health-employers>

NHS Employers – an overview of key themes to consider in your workplace relating to engaging and supporting employees

www.nhsemployers.org/your-workforce/retain-and-improve/staff-experience/health-work-and-wellbeing/protecting-staff-and-preventing-ill-health/supporting-line-managers/managers-guide-on-supporting-workplace-mental-health/promoting-a-healthy-approach-to-work

Mental Health First Aid – Line Manager's Resource

<https://mhfaengland.org/line-managers-resource/>

Rethink Mental Illness Training Packages

www.rethink.org/services-groups/mental-health-training

Remploy Advisory Services (RAS)

<http://information.remploy.co.uk/acton/fs/blocks/showLandingPage/a/12273/p/p-00bd/t/page/fm/0?sid=TV2:7kRU4ipvz>

MIND resources

www.mind.org.uk/workplace/training-consultancy

HSE tool to help assess line managers' abilities in dealing with stress related issues

www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mcit.htm

HSE resources for safety and adaptations:**Display screen equipment guidance – includes advice on setting up work stations**

www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/index.htm

Manual Handling guidance

www.hse.gov.uk/msd/manualhandling.htm

The HSE resource page on manual handling also provides your business with tools to assess risk factors for developing MSK issues such as poor posture, exposure times and repetitive action.

MAC tool for lifting, carrying and lowering

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/mac/index.htm>

V-mac tool for employees dealing with varied load weights

www.hse.gov.uk/msd/mac/vmac/index.htm

ART tool for manual tasks that require repetitive upper limb movements

www.hse.gov.uk/msd/uld/art/

Push/Pull (RAPP) tool for moving loads by pushing and pulling

www.hse.gov.uk/msd/pushpull/index.htm

Information about living with and managing pain:**An in-depth approach to addressing back pain**

<http://meccback.co.uk/back-pain-the-facts/>

Arthritis Research UK – Working with arthritis www.arthritisresearchuk.org/policy-and-public-affairs/reports-and-resources/reports/work-report.aspx**Arthritis Research UK – Arthritis and common aches and pains**

www.arthritisresearchuk.org/Arthritis-information/common-pain.aspx

Arthritis Research UK – Resource page on living and managing aches and pains

www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/arthritis-and-daily-life.aspx

Arthritis Research UK – exercises to manage pain www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/exercises-to-manage-pain.aspx**ARMA resource for back pain**

<http://arma.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/bp06.pdf>

ARMA resource for regional MSK pain

<http://arma.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/rmpweb.pdf>

ARMA resource for MSK foot problems

<http://arma.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/musculoskeletalfothealthproblems.pdf>

ARMA resource for inflammatory arthritis

<http://arma.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/ia06.pdf>

ARMA resource for osteoarthritis

<http://arma.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/oa06.pdf>

ARMA resource for metabolic bone disease

<http://arma.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/mbdweb.pdf>

ARMA resource for connective tissue diseases

<http://arma.uk.net/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/ctdweb.pdf>

Continued overleaf

Resources / courses for employee self-management:

A practical guide

www.health.org.uk/publication/practical-guide-self-management-support

Self-management and arthritis

www.arthritiscare.org.uk/LivingwithArthritis/Self-management/Waystoself-manage

Fit For Work advice hub, live chat feature and toolkit

<http://fitforwork.org>



Case studies

Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust

Ruth Todd, Senior Physiotherapist in Occupational Health

Our wellbeing strategy recognises the goals of the NHS Commissioning for Quality and Innovation (CQUIN) scheme which includes a new standard focussed on the health and wellbeing of staff.

The CQUIN scheme's goals focus on giving our staff better access to health and wellbeing initiatives and supporting them to make healthy choices and lead healthy lives. We know that our greatest strength is in having a healthy workforce.

We communicate our health initiatives in our weekly staff bulletin, All About Aintree, supplemented by posters for staff and a health and wellbeing page on our intranet. We have an ageing workforce and we are seeing more age-related problems and degenerative conditions affecting staff, so we recognise that there may be a need to expand our wellbeing strategy to specifically tackle these issues.

We know that MSK issues are a problem and our response has been to develop Back on Track classes which we run twice a week. Staff can be referred to the classes from our physio service but we also advertise

for anyone to attend. Around 90% of our referrals are self-referral, with the rest via their manager or through our specialist nurse or physician. All sorts of people attend – participants can include someone who has been off work for six months following a back operation through to active individuals employed in sedentary roles who recognise the negative impact their working environment may be having on their MSK health. We also recognise that there are connections between mental health issues and MSK issues. The Back on Track classes help staff to recognise the connection between the two sets of issues and, where required, we will arrange referral to our counselling service.

We believe that individuals are ultimately responsible for their own health and we work with them to set individual outcome measures based on their personal choice. For example, if they simply want to be more active then we set objectives at their first session and measure progress towards their personal goals at the end of six weeks. We get more engagement this way because it is outcome focussed and meaningful and specific to the participant.

Our aim for staff with MSK issues is to get them back to work in some capacity. This might require workplace adaptations or they may need to be redeployed, however our primary goal is to return them to their original role.

We measure our success based on staff feedback forms at the end of each Back on Track class and have seen a positive response.

For other organisations who want to help improve the MSK health of their staff, it is important at the outset to review the risks to staff with a view to preventing problems occurring in the first place. For those staff already suffering with an issue, you should look for ways to increase the speed of referral and to understand that staff should be seen quickly when a problem has been identified. Early intervention means that they should improve more quickly, be less disabled by their condition and are therefore less likely to need time off work.

Anglian Water Group

Sonja-Louise Schwartz, Occupational Health Manager

We take a holistic approach to wellbeing and want coming to work to be a positive experience that helps to improve the wellbeing of all our employees. We have a mixture of office based, laboratory and operational employees and the split between those in sedentary vs active roles is fairly even. Like many organisations, looking after our employees' musculoskeletal health can be a challenge, particularly as our low attrition rate means our workforce is ageing.

We do a lot to encourage musculoskeletal health; it's not something you put on to come to work and then take off when you get home. Slouching on the sofa, lifting the shopping or working in the garden can all affect the musculoskeletal system. We don't just train people in manual handling – it is just as important that employees know how fit their body is to undertake a manual handling task. As part of our manual handling training we include posture checks, spinal and hip flexibility and leg strength. We also provide advice on how to improve fitness, and information on healthy living and how it benefits the musculoskeletal system. Office employees are encouraged to undertake desk exercises walking one to one's and we have offered posture checks at roadshows.

Equipment also plays a part in our people's health. New equipment is often reviewed for ergonomics and risk by an appropriate working group as part of the buying process, and we encourage our employees to choose the right equipment for themselves.

We actively encourage near miss reporting and ask employees to recognise potential risks caused by how their work is organised, or hazards they encounter. We log all reports of near misses and alert others to the risk. Mitigation could involve attaching a warning sign to a piece of operational equipment to alert people to a valve that's stiff to operate, or signage to alert teams to a lid that is too heavy for one person to safely lift. Employees are encouraged to try and resolve a problem when they discover it if they can safely.

We feel passionately about the importance of health education and giving people the ability to look after their health, without lecturing them. We have a number of initiatives in place, including proactive sessions and office roadshows, videos giving advice on topics chosen by employees, and specific health campaigns, such as video and interactive sessions for HGV drivers on how to keep fit on the road, including musculoskeletal

advice and exercises they can do. We also have a "Things that make you go Ooh" video showing activities both at work and at home that can cause musculoskeletal injury.

Anglian Water have a health care scheme for all employees and this provides access to a physio support line as well as face-to-face physiotherapy, where required. For those needing further investigation and intervention there is a musculoskeletal pathway providing access to fast-track care.

We will always make adaptations, where possible, for those suffering with musculoskeletal disorders. This might involve adapting vehicles for operational staff or special desks, chairs, mouse and keyboard for office based staff. We are also lucky to have our own in-house occupational health team to work with managers to help employees remain at work, or with an employee's return to work.

Our opinion is that anything that helps to reduce musculoskeletal injuries is a good thing. We want our employees to be fit and healthy right up to the point of retiring from work and for them to be fully able to enjoy their future.

Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust

Fay Davies, Head of Workforce Development

Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust is a predominately community based organisation with 2,800 staff across 60 bases. We have two mental health inpatient facilities offering adult, older peoples, intensive care, learning disabilities assessment and treatment and low secure services. We are a lead organisation for the NHS England healthy workforce programme and our aim is to improve our staff health and wellbeing through a combination of education, support and wellbeing initiatives. We want to achieve long-term behaviour change through the activities we offer, such as eating healthily, engaging in physical exercise and improving emotional wellbeing.

We've developed a campaign – **wellbeing@work** – to communicate our health and wellbeing initiatives which is recognised by staff. We have 45 wellbeing champions who communicate our messages – for example, they advertise initiatives, circulate statistics, feed information to team meetings, and play

a crucial role on two way communication, providing staff ideas. Feedback from staff about the impact of health and activity initiatives is very important to us, particularly about staff levels of enjoyment, as well as sustained behaviour change.

Our initiatives include weight loss challenges, which are really popular and we provide incentives such as discounted weight watchers vouchers. Other initiatives include regular pedometer challenges which aim to increase staff activity levels and a 'Couch to 5k' running programme. Incentives include local discount deals for fitness centres, tennis clubs and military fitness groups as well as organising exercise programmes e.g. zumba and pilates. In common with most organisations, stress, anxiety and depression are a leading cause of absence in the Trust and we have invested in leadership development training to support staff in this area, and offer extended access to psychological therapies.

We are conscious of having an ageing workforce, and of the need to support staff of all ages. We have a number of groups who are prone to MSK problems due to the nature of their work.

We offer a dedicated fast track physiotherapy service for staff reporting an MSK health issue. Staff are referred by their line manager so that the line manager is involved and understands any health issues and their impact at work and to support staff with any adjustments. Staff with MSK issues that prevent them from working also have access to the physiotherapy service. One staff member with a neck issue recently wrote to thank us: "I feel incredibly supported; the treatment shortened my absence and supported my return to work"

Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust *continued*

We ensure that staff are aware of the basics such as how to set up their desk correctly, for example, or if staff are community based we provide guidance on the safe use of laptops as part of the initial training. We also cover posture training e.g. sitting, and moving regularly.

We offer half day MSK health workshops which staff can book directly that have had excellent feedback. The workshops cover lower back, upper back, neck, shoulder and knee. They focus on self-help: self-management and doing exercises regularly. Most exercises are chair based which can be done during the day without staff having to leave their desk. We want staff to attend before they develop a problem and we send attendees videos of the exercises so they can ensure they are doing them correctly. We have also invested in a wellbeing portal and app which allows staff to set their own goals and measure progress for exercise weight loss, smoking, and safe alcohol use. The preventative workshops make a big difference and do not have a big cost implication. Ultimately, prevention is key.

John Lewis Partnership

Nick Davison, Head of Health Services

Health services were first established in the Partnership in 1929, in recognition that our Partners needed to be fit to provide the quality of service our customers expected and for which we have become renowned. Whilst they have changed many times over the years the original premise remains as valid today as it did in 1929.

Whilst we haven't historically talked in the language of "Wellbeing" many of our initiatives and opportunities have developed a culture which aligns strongly with a health and wellbeing agenda and explicitly supports the first of the Partnership's seven principles which underpin how the business is run: Principle One – *"the John Lewis Partnership's ultimate purpose is the happiness of all its members, through their worthwhile and satisfying employment in a successful business"*.

We are a large business with 94,000 Partners working across 400 sites, with the majority working in shops or the supply chain, often in physically demanding roles, but also including a diverse range of other functional roles including manufacturing, hospitality, farming and back-office IT, Marketing, Buying, Personnel and Financial roles.

Our Health Services approach combines an internal team of occupational health nurses and allied health professionals, working alongside an independent network of podiatrists and a single national physiotherapy provider, Physio Med, and a psychological service provider, Rehab Works. Our health service is structured to channel all incoming referrals through a central Health Hub, accessed via a portal, enabling greater accessibility, transparency and routing through online referral. 90% of all referrals arrive electronically and allow centralised triage and organisation of work flow across the whole service. The Hub is supported by regional Clinical Case Managers who support the business management and Partners locally in returning Partners to work.

MSK health is particularly important to us due to the size of our Partner population and we have taken specific measures to tailor an insight based approach focused on injury type and severity, improving the speed of response, focusing on outcome measures and returning Partners to better health and greater productivity faster. With nearly half of Partners still at work requiring treatment

(rather than off sick), and with lower back-related injuries making up 40% of injuries we have been able to introduce targeted remote exercise pathways, supported by physiotherapists, which have delivered outcomes as good as traditional face to face treatment but over significantly shorter time scales and at much lower costs. This has allowed affected Partners to remain at work and get better faster, producing significant productivity gains for the business whilst more severe injuries continue to receive hands on treatment.

With so many of our partners being shop-based, podiatry is also an important area for us. This year we scanned 2,000 pairs of feet to help people understand their feet and their gait – identifying early issues before they have become problematic and giving advice on footwear. This proactive approach to education will develop over time as greater emphasis switches to a wider proactive wellbeing agenda, focused on the long-term health of our Partners and the Partnership which will drive the long-term success of the Partnership.

L'Oréal Professionnel

Tanguy Le Baud, Director of Global Business Development

At L'Oréal Professionnel our approach to wellbeing extends beyond our staff. We supply hairdressing products to over 7 million hairdressers worldwide. These are our partners and we recognise that musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are the cause of high levels of absenteeism and early retirement compared with other industries.

Hairdressers are particularly exposed to MSDs. Standing for many hours in their salon, repeating gestures and adopting bad postures while shampooing, styling or blowdrying can lead to severe back and neck pains and carpal tunnel syndrome affecting hands and wrists. In the US, absenteeism and financial compensation due to MSDs represent 20 billion dollars; in France, the financial impact is estimated at 1 billion euros. MSDs can also lead hairdressers to retire up to 10 years before their planned retirement date.

We help our partners in the hairdressing industry to take better care of their own musculoskeletal health. We have developed a training programme built around the concept of a 15 minute warm up each day with a subsequent focus on adopting appropriate postures when attending to client's hairdressing needs.

As of the end of 2016 431,000 hairdressers worldwide have been trained in the 15 minute daily exercise regimen. To further our commitment, L'Oréal Professionnel has launched a new free mobile application, "15' Coach", to help hairdressers prevent MSDs. As well as the exercises we have a facility in the App which enables individual hairdressers to monitor their own personal pain levels on a regular basis. The pain measurements are automatically fed back to our database and through analysis we are able to measure overall the impact of our programme.

Take up of the App continues to grow and we are pleased to see the number of countries where the App is in daily use. We expect continued success and we expect the incidence of MSDs in hairdressers to be better managed on a self-help basis, reducing absence from work and with hairdressers enabled to work for longer periods.

Recognising that MSDs are the single biggest reason for working days lost throughout the world we strongly recommend that other industries take a similar approach to ours. Work to identify what are the main occurrences of MSDs within your own sector; find expert opinion that will help with solutions and then develop a strategy to implement those solutions.

Absence is no good for anyone and MSDs are the biggest cause of absence. Working to prevent MSKs will benefit your organisation and the lives of your staff.

Leicestershire Police

Sally Porch, Healthy Living and Fitness Advisor; Colette Cloete, HR Business Partner

Our Wellbeing strategy is developing rapidly and is high on our agenda with top line support from our Chief Officer Team. Our aim is to provide the platform for people to look after themselves.

We have 3,500 staff employed in a number of roles including police officers, police community support officers and police staff. They fulfil a wide range of duties from dog handling and emergency response to traffic control, call management and IT support. Each of the roles has different physical demands. Our police officers have to pass an annual fitness test which is unique compared with other organisations. Many support roles can be sedentary by nature but we recognise that this poses a different set of physical challenges.

We use the Force intranet and a wellbeing website as an easy way to communicate our strategies and initiatives. We also include wellbeing as a topic for discussion in regional forums and meetings, and are considering appointing workplace champions to help us promote our initiatives and gather

ideas from our staff. We recognise that not everyone looks at the intranet daily so we take roadshows out to reach those who we wouldn't otherwise have contact with – face to face communication is really important and there's no substitute for being out there for example the Cycle to Work Scheme is now in its 5th year with 935 participants as is supported by roadshows and other cycle challenges throughout the year.

Our initiatives to improve physical wellbeing have so far included a static bike challenge, step-action to climb Everest, yoga and other exercise classes, and the British Heart Foundation Workplace Challenge which aims to increase physical activity in the workplace. Staff engagement has been good but we recognise that there are still barriers to overcome and we make our initiatives as accessible as possible. Shift work is a particular challenge so our exercise classes are available at lunch time, early morning and in the evening. Bite size yoga and meditation sessions are available on the intranet and these have been tailored to the physical

demands of various roles. There are plans to extend this initiative and also to install an outdoor trim trail at FHQ to provide another option for exercise. There are three subsidised gyms located around the Force area that are accessible 24/7 365 days a year and those that are members of the Force Sports and Leisure (FSL) have subsidised access to outside gym and leisure facilities. The FSL also supports and funds a wide range of sports groups including fitness classes, badminton, sailing, swimming, cycling and tennis.

When a health issue is identified trained staff will conduct risk assessments and reasonable adjustments are often made. Where necessary, referrals are made to our in-house Occupational Health service. The main aim is to get the person back to their original role which sometimes means with suitable adjustments, or if this is not possible we will look for an alternative role.

Continued overleaf

Leicestershire Police *continued*

We have a performance development group that looks at attendance and reasons for non-attendance and the number of people restricted from being able to do their main role as this is really important for our managers to understand and support. We share information and best practice initiatives with other forces, particularly if there is a common reason for sickness that is causing concern. Our Police Force is in the top quartile for Police and Police Staff attendance nationally.

We attribute our successes to our engagement with staff and also the Trade Union and Staff Associations locally and we try to provide and promote as many opportunities and support mechanisms to improve or maintain wellbeing rather than telling people what is good for them.

Mars Chocolate UK

Helen Wray, Health & Wellbeing Business Partner; Louisa Mead Health, Safety & Environment Advisor

At Mars, we have a strong global culture with people at its heart that helps to create an environment that supports wellbeing. We are absolutely committed to giving our Associates (employees) the opportunity to maintain their health and fitness at work and beyond. Our UK Occupational Health service works closely with Health & Safety supporting wellbeing and health across our Slough site which goes beyond a traditional office environment; we have a large factory as well as a research and development facility, engineering workshops and product dispatch. Health and safety is a priority for all our Associates and manual handling training is compulsory for those with more physically active roles.

Musculoskeletal (MSK) health is one of the most significant factors that contributes to absence among our manufacturing Associates, and also remains a cause for concern in other areas of our business.

Our in-house 'Winning with Wellness' campaign supports our focus on MSK issues – it is designed to educate our Associates to take the best care of themselves and to create the right environment to promote

wellbeing. We recognise that it is important to keep people moving and also to support more sedentary office-based Associates to be more active. We encourage people to put this into practice, through simple activities such as walking meetings and calls, which help people take more steps in their normal course of business. In addition, we conduct regular health hazard audits and identify at-risk groups who are then seen every two years for MSK assessments and other health checks. We have created a bespoke manual handling training programme for our trainers based on behavioural principles which has significantly reduced this hazard in our manufacturing site.

Associates have access to a recently-opened on-site gym, as well as personal trainer support, weekly exercise classes and sports clubs and we have quarterly plans for health and wellbeing programmes throughout the year.

Line managers know where to get help for their Associates and they understand the need for early referral – MSK issues are dealt with rapidly and collaboratively. It is important that our Associates are part of the process

for identifying any adaptations needed to accommodate an issue and, for the majority, a collaborative solution is achieved.

Absence is never a desirable outcome, so our approach is to keep people doing something where they can. Our aim is to give an Associate with MSK issues the necessary adjustments to keep them in their current roles. We find that we can achieve a lot with small modifications that allow Associates with MSK issues to continue working.

We have on-site physiotherapy available to all Associates on a self-referral basis; for remote working or field-based people such as our Sales force we also provide rapid access to external physiotherapy. We have high mileage notifications for Associates who do a lot of air travel and we take simple steps to help, such as ensuring they have appropriate wheelie bags and light weight laptops to make their travel easier and more manageable.

Continued overleaf

Mars Chocolate UK *continued*

We promote wellbeing initiatives through our internal communications channels, making use of email, posters and noticeboards in high footfall areas, for example. Many managers include wellbeing and resilience objectives in Associates' Personal Development Plans and it is established practice to begin all one-on-one interviews with the question 'how are you?'. This helps our Associates to feel comfortable talking about their general health and raising any specific concerns. It is a good way to understand the impact of wellness on individual performance.

For us, keeping our people motivated, productive, happy and healthy isn't just important – it's essential.

Philips Electronics UK Limited

Clare Gowar, Health and Wellbeing Account Manager

In January 2016, Philips UK&I converted its head office in Guildford to an Agile Working environment, providing ergonomic chairs for all employees, removing assigned desks, installing sit-to-stand work stations and running targeted campaigns to encourage employees to be more physically active while at work. The introduction of Agile Working was a step change for the business so employee communication and support was a key requirement to ensure the new environment would be positively received and actively embraced.

A team of Change Agents made up of employee volunteers oversaw the transition. They were supported by a further team of Ergo Mentors, who were fully trained on how to operate the new ergonomic chairs and were there to assist colleagues in their

work station set-up. Working with their on-site physio and DSE advisor, Philips also created a bespoke online DSE training and assessment course for Agile Working employees, which enabled them to assess their work station set-up and provided clear guidance for maintaining postural health. Employees no longer had assigned desks but were encouraged to 'hot desk', which led to better integration and communication with their colleagues and encouraged them to spend more time moving around the office. Water coolers and break out areas were positioned away from desk areas, again to encourage employees to be more mobile and the introduction of eight, sit-to-stand desks was particularly popular with employees who had existing MSK conditions and were now able to continue working while adopting different postural positions.

Philips ran further activities throughout the year that focused on musculoskeletal health, including promoting desk-based stretching exercises and supporting national campaigns like 'On Your Feet Britain' which encouraged employees to use the stairs, hold walking meetings and resulted in the launch of a weekly walking club.

The outcome of all these activities and the adoption of an Agile Working environment has resulted in a positive culture change, with 24% of employees believing they were now more active at work, compared to 11% the previous year.

Santander

Kevin Robinson, Regional Health & Safety Consultant, Human Resources

At Santander our approach to health, safety and wellbeing starts at the top and runs at every level. We recognise that looking after our people is an important corporate responsibility. That said, health and wellbeing starts with an individual taking responsibility for themselves – and we ensure that we have resources and systems in place to help colleagues resolve their own concerns where ever possible.

It is important to us that colleagues understand when a concern could begin to affect their health and wellbeing at work. The nature of our business means that risks to colleague health are relatively low, but the sedentary nature of office-based work may present a musculoskeletal (MSK) risk if not properly managed. This applies to our colleagues in retail banking and also those in corporate banking like our traders; who can spend up to 12 hours a day looking at an array of screens in a role requiring high levels of concentration.

Supporting our people begins before their first day in the organisation. After someone accepts a job with us we ask them to complete a confidential Pre-placement Questionnaire (PEQ) where they have the opportunity to declare any underlying medical conditions they may have so that we can put in place supportive measures before they start work with us. On induction colleagues are also asked to complete a range of e-learning including training about workstation ergonomics and the importance of adjusting their workstation to suit their individual needs and achieve a comfortable and safe working posture. Colleagues then complete a formal “safe working with display screen equipment risk assessment” with their line manager to make sure any ergonomic risks have been identified and controlled.

MSK issues are one of the top three causes of long-term sickness within our business and Santander recognises the link with common mental health conditions. We know that

colleagues who are absent due to MSK condition may be in pain and that this can, sometimes put their psychological wellbeing at risk, potentially increasing their time away from work.

It is crucial to recognise issues as early as possible and to take prompt and effective action to resolve a developing concern. Managers are asked to review display screen equipment risk assessments with their colleagues every year and to proactively identify any concerns that might affect someone’s health. This commonly includes simple things like poor posture, incorrectly set up equipment or a lack of short work breaks or change in activity.

Where colleagues are in any doubt about any aspect of their workstation safety they are encouraged to access detailed ergonomic guidance and advice through Santander’s integrated health, safety and wellbeing website.

Santander *continued*

Colleagues are always encouraged to resolve concerns themselves in the first instance, and this often involves making some simple, straight forward changes to their workstation or working practices.

Where a colleague is concerned that they may have a developing problem the Health, Safety and Wellbeing team will always react quickly to help resolve the matter. They have developed an “approved supplier list” so that ergonomic aids are easily identified, for fast track delivery.

Kevin Robertson, one of Santander’s Regional Health and Safety Consultants explains that, for him, the important thing is to talk to a colleague, to try to understand what their problem is and to ask them what might help. The person doing the job often knows best! Recently Kevin was asked to support a financial trader with a serious,

chronic back condition. By providing a height adjustable electronic desk his colleague now has the option to adopt a traditional sedentary posture or work standing up when the need arises. This has helped the colleague remain in work, reduce the pain and discomfort they were experiencing and improve their overall wellbeing. There are also positive business outcomes through reduced absence, increased motivation and exceptional performance on the trading floor.

Pro-actively Santander’s Health, Safety and Wellbeing team issue a quarterly Health and Lifestyle Update to colleagues across the bank encouraging physical health through good diet and exercise and psychological wellbeing.

Kevin notes that, by actively demonstrating that the Bank genuinely cares about the health and wellbeing of its people there is a direct impact on job satisfaction, engagement and workplace performance.

Sitel Newcastle

Pamela Avornyo, Learning and Development Manager

Sitel Newcastle became involved with the North East Better Health at Work Award in 2012. We wanted to invest time and effort in helping people benefit from information, advice and guidance around making healthier choices for themselves and their families and so set about creating a strategy to support and drive our mission. To meet this objective, we promote health education and access to information through delivery of a series of targeted campaigns and health related events throughout the year.

To determine the focus of our events, we invite all staff to complete our annual survey each January. This is key to our success as it really gets to the heart of what people want and ensures we meet the well-being needs of our team rather than us simply imposing our ideas and initiatives on them.

The HR Manager and I lead both the programme and a team of health advocate volunteers who represent the different areas of our business. We analyse the survey feedback as well as attendance data to determine the focus of our initiatives then work together to organise events, source

information and liaise with our local health teams and contacts. We produce an evidence portfolio to support attainment of the award levels as well as material for use in team meetings and for display then use our intranet site to communicate initiatives to the wider team.

As well as delivering a variety of health and well-being initiatives on site we also support our business leaders to develop the skills required to effectively manage and work with their team members. They receive attendance management training which focuses on review of our key processes as well as promoting understanding of the issues our staff face. The course covers how to approach health related conversations and what can be said to guide discussions. In addition to this, we also deliver comprehensive training on how to support and work with people as individuals to allow them to deliver their best performance and maintain their self-worth, increase confidence and self-esteem.

We firmly believe that if a staff member is in a good place in terms of well-being then good performance will follow. To support this we aim to assess well-being face to face and encourage our leaders to begin weekly one to one sessions on the human side and promote talking about well-being and how the person is as the first topic of conversation.

90% of our front line staff handle calls. This means their work is desk based and sedentary by nature and consequently, means MSK health is an issue. All staff have an annual DSE (display screen equipment) assessment. Those who develop or have an existing MSK condition outside of this advise their line manager who will, in the first instance, organise a trained assessor to complete the check to identify if any adaptations or special equipment is needed. The focus is on keeping the member of staff in the current role and enabling them to continue with their work therefore our health and safety manager as well as the HR manager would also be closely involved.

Continued overleaf

Sitel Newcastle *continued*

As back pain and MSK conditions are often cited as topics our team would like more information on, we work with a local chiropractor who has visited our site on a number of occasions to complete back assessments. They have also delivered training to our team around posture and back care which we have been able to incorporate into our induction training programme. This strengthens our well-being offering and places emphasis on the importance of completing exercise at work when seated to improve health and well-being as well as having the correct desk set up.

We have also introduced a range of health related flexible learning qualifications through a local provider covering subjects such as Mental Health Awareness, Nutrition and Health, Working with Individuals with Learning Disabilities, End of Life Care, Understanding Autism, Diabetes Care and Dementia Care. The courses are open to anyone regardless of company level or tenure and are often undertaken by people to support themselves or a family member. Feedback on this offering has been fantastic, people very much appreciate being able to learn for themselves not just to perform better in their day to day work or career.

At Sitel our solid framework of health related policies and practices ensure that all Sitel employees are safe and supported in their working environment. In general our staff are comfortable, happy and engaged. The learning that has taken place through this initiative has led people to live healthier lifestyles, lose weight and discover some serious health conditions they did not know about until we started delivering this programme. They are now receiving treatment and are on the road to good health. We encourage everyone to engage with our well-being programme however, if we are able to help even one person make a better choice and a positive change to their health or lifestyle then we consider that a success which spurs us on to work harder to support our team.

Unilever

Marcus Hunt, Health & Wellbeing Manager, Europe; Sarah Forsythe – UK Occupational Physician

Unilever has 23 sites in the UK and employs 7,500 staff engaged in the Supply Chain, Research and Development and office environments. This includes the Global head office. We take a holistic approach to employee health using a UK led, global health and wellbeing strategy. This is based on four critical pillars: emotional, mental and physical health, and purposefulness. Employee Wellbeing is also embedded into our Unilever Sustainable Living Plan, in which we strive to enrich the lives of up to 2 billion people across the globe – which includes our valued employees.

Within our Physical Health pillar our Occupational Health team has performed a deeper dive into protecting the musculoskeletal (MSK) health of staff. Our 2 target employee groups (and largest) are the UKI Supply Chain business and our office-based sedentary colleagues.

In addition across our business MSK issues account for up to 40% of our wellbeing costs within Occupational Health and Medical

insurance. This is consistent across the industry and across Supply Chain and office-based roles, but to us this is a substantial employee group to whom we would like to offer an increasing level of support. For this, we have built an educational and engaging programme upon which to showcase our MSK support, awareness and to encourage employee empowerment of prevention and condition management. We know decreased activity, especially with a sedentary lifestyle can have a negative health impact, often described as the new smoking. We also know that being active – 20 mins per day has a notable impact upon depression (30%), some cancers (up to 40%) and reduces the incidence of MSK injury.

For line managers, staff wellbeing, diversity and inclusivity are given equal importance.

For all line managers a one-page guide for how to manage musculoskeletal health is available and for all employees there is a similar guide on how to access our holistic health services. All our colleagues

also have access to our Wellbeing journey planner – a credit card size guide describing our Wellbeing resources, the reason to access them and how to make access. The emphasis mostly being upon our Mental Health and Physical Health resources. Our MSK management support is our 'Day 1 Referral' into occupational physiotherapy, which promotes immediate referral for a colleague who is reporting difficulty with a musculoskeletal concern. This process is supported by the close working relationship between Occupational Health, HR and the local site line managers. We work closely with the business to manage MSK health problems and get staff back to work appropriately, we promote early access to physiotherapy and early return to work rehabilitation programmes with a growing number of our site having on site gym/rehab facilities.

Our 'Active U' campaign started in May 2016, with its aim being to reduce sedentary behaviour for those desk based employees and to increase an employees understanding of the importance of physical capability

Continued overleaf

Unilever *continued*

in non-office environments. We wanted to empower employees to understand and improve their physical capabilities and to assist employees learning more about building components of movement into their everyday lives (and how it benefits upon physical and mental health).

Staff participation has been excellent: We conducted 'Active U' roadshows at 15 of our sites and have seen more than 2,000 colleagues visit these during their working day. Our roadshow presents Active U in four components – Active Workplace, Active Transport, Active Health and Active Happiness. The theme is to enable discussions of how impactful 'being active' can be and how just 20 mins per day can have a positive impact, within these four areas. These roadshows were held collaboratively with our partners from Connect Physiotherapy (our national occupational physio provider), UK Active and our local site Wellbeing champion teams, to open up discussions on physical capacity, movement measurement and the perceived barriers of being active. We also

provided mini-physiotherapy functional assessments during the events to help our employees understand their physical capabilities and areas of improvement, that we could support – for enhanced work and home functional movement.

As a national programme, we have yet to analyse the national results but we can report many colleagues are increasing activity in their day, with the support of our workplace teams – with our Gentle Gym classes, workplace walking maps, increasing the onsite gym provision, providing active meeting rooms, senior leaders role-modelling 'active behaviour' and our work location specific yoga stretch routine which is periodically displayed across all site plasma screens. All material is also held within our Wellbeing hub, which all of our employees have access to on our company intranet.

For us, data is crucial – it has made a big difference in allowing us to justify initiatives using sound evidence. Data has proved crucial in getting the right stakeholder support and convincing sites to adopt health

initiatives. To support early physiotherapy referral and to empower line managers to be increasingly proactive to consider the wellbeing of their employees. Results have been outstanding with a 6-figure saving in absenteeism identified in one factory, as a result of a pro-active and holistic approach to managing musculoskeletal absence.

Data has also supported the design of initiatives where we use a 'keep it simple' approach – we try to understand what our staff "need to know" and how they like this information to be communicated to them. Our approach is to present a case for good health and fitness that helps staff to understand that they need to be fit for their jobs, fit for their kids and fit for their eventual retirement. Individual health management and Wellbeing education is their opportunity to be ready for the future.

Unipart

Deborah Astles, HR Director, Corporate Responsibility and Policy

Our corporate Wellbeing Strategy, Unipart Workwell, is based on the premise that our people are ultimately responsible for their own health and wellbeing and that their decisions and behaviour will impact not just their own wellbeing but also the wellbeing of others. Our strategy also recognises that some people, by the nature of their role are able to have a greater impact in the workplace – namely line managers and team leaders – and we offer additional support and training for these roles.

We are keen that our employees can easily identify and engage with our Wellbeing activities so to this end we promote our events and initiatives using easily identifiable and brightly coloured logos which we also include on any printed materials and emails.

Unipart is a very diverse group of companies covering a wide range of activities in different sectors and different locations. Unipart Workwell inspires all our people through a network of volunteer Wellbeing Champions who, in addition to being passionate about wellbeing, are well known to staff on their site and enthusiastically organise health check days amongst other things. The MD of our

Logistics Division has stipulated that all staff must be given the opportunity to attend site Wellbeing events so extended breaks are made available where necessary. We also communicate regularly to our employees using a number of channels including noticeboards, an intranet, email, management briefs and we also talk about wellbeing in our regular corporate news video which goes out about every 6 weeks.

As well as encouraging direct engagement by staff we also focus on specific areas of concern – such as training our leaders on mental health issues. This approach has been very successful and we recognise the opportunity to expand this approach to musculoskeletal (MSK) health.

MSK issues are one of our major reasons for absence, as well as being one of the main reasons for private health insurance claims. We try to protect our colleagues from these issues according to the type of work they do. For example for warehouse staff, where physical lifting characterises their work, manual handling training is mandated and updated on a regular basis.

We expect staff whose MSK issues are impacting their ability to effectively perform their role to talk to their line manager as a first port of call. The line manager would then usually involve Occupational Health to recommend adjustments to accommodate the individual (e.g. providing new equipment) or to modify the role (e.g. limiting lifting). For desk-based sedentary workers, DSE checks are carried out on a regular basis and again, where MSK problems are impacting their ability to do their job we look to our Occupational Health professionals to recommend suitable adjustments

We are extremely proud of our Unipart Workwell programme and would encourage all employers to consider implementing a Workplace Wellbeing programme. It's important to demystify Workplace Wellbeing programmes – they do not need to be complex or expensive to be effective and there is a wealth of expertise and resources available through charities and the public sector.

Walkers Deli (Samworth Brothers)

Victoria Curtis, Personnel Manager; Jane Williams, Occupational Health Advisor

We have 400 staff working directly in production and 140 in office based or supervisory work. Our production staff work in a chilled environment and much of the work is repetitive by nature as well as involving heavy lifting and reaching. As a result we are very aware of our employees' health and of muscular-skeletal (MSK) issues in particular.

Our wellbeing strategy clearly reflects the Samworth brothers' belief in PQP – People, Quality, Profit – with particular emphasis on the 'people' side. We try to get our wellbeing message correct for the audience we are trying to support and provide opportunities which give staff a chance to engage.

We introduced free diabetes monitoring and annual basic health checks like hearing, eye testing and BMI. Staff enjoy the testing and getting the results and then have the right information to take action if necessary. Healthy eating and exercise are more difficult to achieve – barriers to healthy eating include working in a cold environment and barriers to exercise include time.

We carry out a regular survey about health, weight, exercise and lifestyle and ask for ideas about activities that staff would like to get involved in. We want to make sure that our wellbeing initiatives reflect what people are asking for. Communication is through induction and the company handbook. Wellbeing events are communicated by email and posters, and we are considering introducing distinctive branding so that these are instantly recognisable.

We have a private healthcare scheme that all staff are invited to join. Costs are minimal and it is well used – the fact that it is organised to be locally accessible and to fit in with shifts is really welcomed.

Dealing with MSK issues is very well understood. Early referral is important. Our procedure is for staff to report aches and pains to their team leader who will refer them to Occupational Health (OH). It is part of team leader training to understand how and when to refer people with health issues. Our team leaders are constantly monitoring behaviours on site from the point of view of wellbeing and safety.

In our production areas we have implemented a policy of micro breaks where the supervisor stops the production line periodically during the day and staff take a step back and carry out a series of micro exercises. Our policy is also to switch around tasks during the day to reduce the amount of repetitiveness – our supervisors understand the importance of change.

Manual handling training is part of the induction process and there are regular refresher courses. We are looking to expand this training to include ergonomics. We know that there are tasks that cannot be eliminated or that constitute a risk and we see the opportunity to apply an ergonomics approach to modify these as far as is practicable.

Our approach to anyone with a health issue is to support them and keep them at work. We aren't interested in whether an MSK issue originated inside or outside of work and either way our objective remains the same: to provide a broad range of support to staff to assist them back into work.

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[Santander](#)

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This toolkit has been developed for employers. The content is based on research evidence and on the experiences of what employers and employees, including those with musculoskeletal problems, have found to reduce the impact of such problems on work. It has been developed for PHE and ARMA by Business in the Community, Forster Communications and the Bone and Joint Research Group, Royal Cornwall Hospital. We would like to thank all the experts, employers, employees and organisations that have contributed their knowledge, experience and time.

Resources for employers

Business in the Community and Public Health England have developed a range of toolkits to support employers with employee health and wellbeing:

-  **Mental Health Toolkit for Employers**
-  **Reducing the risk of suicide: a preventative guide for employers**
-  **Crisis management in the event of a suicide: a postvention guide for employers**
-  **Crisis Musculoskeletal health in the workplace: a guide for employers**

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