



Lifting and carrying

Back injuries are the greatest single cause of absenteeism from the workplace, often caused by manual handling activities, eg the lifting and carrying of loads. ATL is concerned at the number of members injured as a result of such activities.

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, which apply to all workplaces across the UK, were enacted to minimise the health risks associated with physically lifting, carrying, putting down, pushing, pulling or moving a load by hand or bodily force. A 'load' could be a person, an animal or an inanimate object.

It is easy for education staff to find themselves involved in moving and handling loads, either in the classroom or during physical activities such as PE or design and technology.

However, we advise members that:

- It is unreasonable for you to be directed to lift or carry heavy or awkwardly shaped loads; education staff are generally not trained to tackle such tasks and nor is it a condition of employment.
- You should not move filing cabinets, cupboards, desks, pianos, etc.
- You should carefully consider the weight of minor equipment and books before any attempt is made to lift them.
- You should not involve pupils/students in lifting or moving large or heavy items, such as desks, cabinets, stage and sports equipment, etc.
- You must promptly record details of any strains or injury in the school/college accident book and keep a copy of the record.

Some staff, especially those working with physically disabled students, may be required under the terms of their employment to carry out lifting. Specialist training is required for staff that assist and support pupils with physical disabilities or mobility problems. This can involve the use of specialist equipment such as hoists and slings, and staff should not attempt to assist in any such operation unless they have received appropriate training.

Manual handling risk assessments

Employers are required by the Manual Handling Operations Regulations to carry out manual handling assessments, based on the principle of avoiding carrying out these tasks, where possible. This may be achieved by the use of mechanical aids. As this may not be possible with all tasks, those involved must be provided with information, instruction and training in safe lifting techniques.

Significant findings of the risk assessment should be recorded. Individual strength, whether loads are heavy/bulky/unwieldy, bumpy/slippery floors and mechanical aids ought to be included in the checklist. ATL considers it reasonable for members of staff to be consulted about the risk assessment, especially heads of department, safety representatives and members of a safety committee.

The regulations do not set specific limits on the maximum weight an individual can be expected to lift unaided. However, an appendix sets out an approximate boundary within which lifting or lowering of a load is unlikely to cause injury.

Lifting and carrying checklist

ATL members who do carry out manual handling activities can minimise potential risk to themselves and students when handling loads by:

- using lifting devices provided
- ensuring that bulky deliveries are off-loaded in specified areas; delivery drivers are trained in lifting and are given mechanical aids to help them whereas school and college staff generally are not
- storing heavy objects or large items at waist level and so reducing the amount of bending, stooping, stretching, pushing and pulling required
- using steps if you need to reach a high shelf
- checking that your path is clear and there are no obstructions of your line of vision
- standing close to the load before trying to lift it
- keeping feet apart to give a balanced base for lifting
- bending the knees when lifting from a low level
- gripping objects by use of the palm and roots of the fingers and thumb thus avoiding the fingertips
- lifting the head slowly and smoothly, using the leg muscles and not the back, which should remain straight
- avoiding the involvement of students in lifting activities; where this occurs, it should be of a minor nature, adequately supervised, and fall well within the scope of the student's individual capacity.

If you require further information on this or any other health and safety issue, please contact ATL's member advisor on health and safety on 020 7782 1598 or by emailing hs@atl.org.uk.

You can also find lots of advice and information in the health and safety section of our website - see www.atl.org.uk/hands.



Need advice?

Your first point of contact is the ATL rep in your school/college. Your local ATL branch is also available to help, or you can contact ATL's member advisors on 020 7930 6441, email info@atl.org.uk. Don't forget there's lots more advice on ATL's website at www.atl.org.uk.

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