

## Manual Handling

### What is manual handling?

Manual handling is any activity requiring the use of force exerted by a person to lift, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain any person, animal or thing. Manual handling sometimes involves the above actions in sustained and awkward postures, or repetitive motions. It can be as simple as picking up a pen from a table to lowering a heavy box down towards the ground. Therefore, manual handling applies to everyone!



### The principles of good manual handling:

Good manual handling is not all about the correct body position or posture, but planning ahead to make the task as easy, safe and less strenuous on the body possible. The following are a set of guidelines that will assist you in safe manual handling:

- Observe the object/person and identify any potential risks which may make manual handling a difficult and unsafe task. This may be estimating the weight of an object, the awkward shape and whether or not assistance is needed.
- Think about what could go wrong when manual handling an object/person and develop a strategy to overcome the risk in a safe way. If the weight is too heavy asking for assistance of another person would be a safe strategy.
- Where possible redesign the room or path where the object/person needs to be transported. By altering the layout of the room and making room for manual handling the risk of falling and unnecessary movements are reduced.
- Where possible use a mechanical device to aid in manual handling i.e. A sling lifter may be used for a heavy patient with weak legs.



## Steps of safe lifting in manual handling

These guidelines for safe manual handling are an excellent way to prevent injury and unnecessary strain on the body. They include the following:

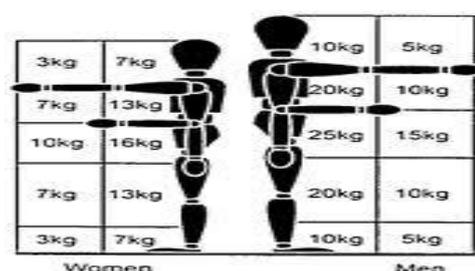
- Warm up – this may not necessarily mean going for a jog or star jumps but after waking up any bodily movements that get the body ready for movement i.e. may be a short walk.
- Clear the path – no objects are in the way of the direction we wish to travel to avoid injury and/or falls.
- Feet shoulder width apart – stable base of support.
- Feet facing direction of travel – avoid an twisting and injury of the spine.
- Holding the load close to the body – less stress on spine and other structures/tissues.
- Maintain a neutral spine – less stress on spine.
- Bend at hips, knees and ankles – using larger muscles groups to aid with lifting objects (which they are designed to do).
- Keep heels on the ground – most balanced position.



*Correct manual lifting procedure*

## What is a safe load to lift?

The recommended weights that can be lifted are: 4.5kg in a seated position and 16-20kg in a standing position. The seat position load is much lower due to the increased force through the spine and elimination of leg muscles in a sitting position. Generally, males may be able to lift more than females, which could be up to 30kg. A single person should not try and lift any more than 55kg – if the weight does exceed 55kg then mechanical assistance or another individual is required. An individual under the age of 18 years of age should not be expected to lift more than 16kg without assistance or appropriate training. Remember everyone is different and will be able to lift different loads.



## The team lift

The same manual handling principles apply as in the single person lift. However, what we sometimes do not do as effectively as we would like is communicate. Making sure communication is effective is the most important part of a team lift. It is so important because:

- It allows us to time the movements evenly on both people apart to avoid injury and any unnecessary forces on one lifter.
- Prepare for the correct forces needed to lift an object/person

*Think about it yourself* – when you go to lift with someone, do you lift on three or after three?



## Where does manual handling and physiotherapy link together?

As a physiotherapist we educate and prescribe various devices to make sure people are manual handling in the safest way possible. This ranges from formal/informal information sessions within the workplace and community settings i.e. nursing homes. The added benefit of an experienced health professional observing and critiquing your manual handling technique could save yourself for injury in the future. After all, prevention is much better than cure.

A physiotherapist will prescribe equipment to patients who are in need i.e. prescribing a wheelie-walker for a patient who is not coping well walking. This further extends to if a patient needed assistance standing up by others or a mechanical aid. Again to this can be reviewed as often as needed.

Communicating the needs of the patient to the families and carers and provide recommendations and referrals to other health practitioners – i.e. if home modifications are required a referral to an occupational therapist will be needed.

