



24.39 Common Work-Related Hand Injuries

Introduction

There are several hand problems that might be caused by or be made worse by your work. They are more common in tasks that involve:

- Prolonged repetitive work, particularly using the same hand or arm action.
- Uncomfortable or awkward working postures.
- Sustained or excessive force.
- Carrying out a task for a long time without suitable rest breaks.
- Working with hand-held power tools for long periods of time.



What types of symptoms are common?

Workers may suffer symptoms in their upper limbs such as:

- Aches and pains, tenderness, weakness, tingling, numbness, cramp, burning, redness and swelling.
- Stiffness, pain or reduced movement in their joints.

There are a few work-related disorders that can affect the hand, including:

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS)

A common condition caused by pressure on the median nerve as it passes through a narrow, rigid passage in the wrist. May also be caused by injury to the nerve by Hand Transmitted Vibration. Characterized by tingling or numbness in part of the hand at rest.

Osteoarthritis (OA)

Osteoarthritis typically presents as, or is aggravated by, joint pain, stiffness, and reduced mobility. It may be associated with repetitive tasks, heavy lifting, or prolonged, awkward postures. Symptoms are often worse during or after work, presenting as swelling, tenderness, crepitus (grating/clicking sounds), and muscle fatigue.

Tendonitis

Tendonitis is when a tendon swells (becomes inflamed). It can cause joint pain and stiffness and affect how a tendon moves. It can be caused by repetitive motions, forceful gripping, or awkward, sustained postures. It is commonly managed with rest, ice, bracing, and anti-inflammatory medication, while prevention involves ergonomic adjustments, frequent breaks, and strengthening exercises.

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)

A permanent, preventable injury to nerves, blood vessels, and joints caused by prolonged use of vibrating tools. Symptoms include tingling, numbness, reduced grip strength, and blanching (vibration white finger).



What should I do if I think that I have a work-related hand problem?

You should report any signs and symptoms at an early stage, to your Occupational Health Practitioner and/or your Supervisor or Manager. This should be done at an early stage before symptoms become too serious.

What else can I do?

- Consult with your GP or a Physiotherapist for assessment and treatment.
- Refer to other Information Leaflets in this series for more information about your condition and simple advice on self-management.

These conditions typically get worse with time if no action is taken and may result in permanent problems if not addressed in a timely manner.

What should my employer do?

Your employer should:

- Encourage workers to report any signs and symptoms at an early stage, before they become more serious.
- If workers report symptoms, consider taking advice from an occupational health provider on a worker's fitness for work and any restrictions or adaptations to their work.
- Assess the risks of harm to identify which tasks are likely to cause harm, identify the likelihood that harm might occur and the factors which the risk.
- Control and reduce the risk that harm might occur by the provision of appropriate tools and the modification or elimination of harmful tasks.

Further reading:

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/uld/index.htm>

A copy of this & other documentation can be found from <https://mohs.co.uk/resources> or using the QR code at the top of this page.