Health and Safety Services

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH
Part of London and South East University Group

General Guidance on Lifting Techniques

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1. Overview

Ensuring safe manual handling and lifting practices is essential in minimizing the risk of musculoskeletal disorders and other injuries. This guidance document aligns with the University's Risk Assessment Framework and supports compliance with the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended 2002). Before any manual handling activity, a risk assessment must be conducted to determine whether handling can be avoided or modified using mechanical aids.

Where manual lifting is necessary, the techniques outlined below should be followed to reduce risk.

2. Definitions

"Control measure" – Something that does / will minimise the likelihood and severity of any injuries or ill health that may occur for all individuals and groups who may be affect by the hazards identified.

"Manual Handling": The process of transporting or supporting a load using bodily force, including lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, or carrying.

"Persons at Risk": When conducting a risk assessment, it is essential to identify all individuals who may be affected by the activity, including those directly involved and others who may be indirectly exposed to potential hazards. To ensure appropriate control measures are in place, these risks must be carefully assessed and documented. The following categories should be considered and recorded in the risk assessment form:

- Individuals performing manual handling tasks, including staff and students.
- Supervisors and team leaders responsible for overseeing safe lifting practices.
- Workers who may be indirectly affected by lifting operations in shared spaces.
- Individuals requiring extra precautions, such as those who are pregnant, have musculoskeletal conditions, or are inexperienced in manual handling.
- Consideration of environmental factors such as workspace layout, surface conditions, and available mechanical aids.

"Reasonably Practicable" - Unless there is a more specific higher legal requirement, usually indicated by '*shall'* or '*as far as practicable',* then most precautions to minimise risk are *'so far as is reasonably practicable.'* In manual handling, the principle of 'so far as is reasonably practicable' means that safety measures should be implemented based on a balance between the risk of injury and the time, effort, and cost required to mitigate that risk. Employers and workers should take all feasible steps to reduce manual handling risks, such as using mechanical aids or adjusting workflows. If the effort to implement a control is disproportionately high compared to the level of risk reduction, that it would be unreasonable to implement them, the employer is not obliged to do so.

"Risk Assessment" – The process of identifying all the health and safety hazards of a given work activity and determining the associated risks, if the work is carried out with the planned precautions. If the risks are deemed to be unacceptably high, the assessment also

identifies additional steps that need to be taken, when and by whom, to reduce the risks further.

"Suitable and Sufficient" – For a risk assessment to be deemed suitable and sufficient it must:

- identify all the hazards associated to lifting, carrying and moving loads.
- ensure risk assessments consider the weight, shape, and movement of loads
- be proportionate to the risks and the nature and duration of the work (e.g. repetitive vs. occasional lifts).
- evaluate individual capability (e.g., physical condition, experience).
- identify additional precautions, if necessary, with timescales and responsibility for their implementation
- be kept up to date (when tasks, environments, or conditions change).

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Information on the responsibilities associated with manual handling are described in HS094 Manual Handling Code of Practice.

4. Guidance on Good Lifting Techniques

There is no universal lifting technique that applies to all situations. The safest method depends on factors such as the weight, size, and shape of the item. For instance, lifting a boxed item with handholds is generally easier than handling an irregularly shaped or unbalanced load. When manual lifting is necessary, the techniques described in related training, and outlined below, should be followed to minimize the risk of injury and strain.

NOTE: Separate guidance is available for Cylinders or Long Narrow Loads and for Pushing & Pulling of loads.

4.1. Best Practices for Safe Lifting

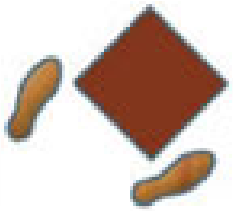


Plan Before You Lift

Before lifting, assess the load and the environment. Determine whether handling aids such as trolleys or lifting equipment can be used and identify the best placement for the load. If assistance is needed, seek help rather than lifting alone. Remove any obstructions, such as discarded packaging or uneven surfaces, to create a safe working area. For long lifts, consider resting the load on a stable surface midway to readjust your grip.

Assess the Load

Examine the load for stability, weight distribution, and any sharp edges or damages that may increase the risk of injury. Avoid carrying oversized loads that obstruct your vision and always use mechanical aids or seek help when necessary.



Adopt a Stable Position

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, placing one foot slightly in front of the other to maintain balance. If lifting from the ground, position yourself close to the load. Be ready to adjust your footing as needed and

avoid wearing tight clothing or inappropriate footwear that may restrict movement.

Maintain Good Posture

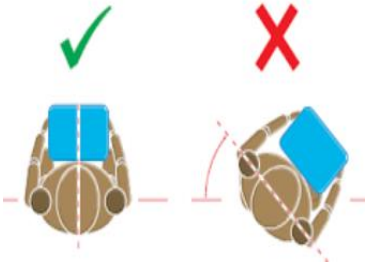


Start the lift with a slight bend at the back, hips, and knees rather than fully bending the back (stooping) or squatting deeply. Keep your back straight and engage your leg muscles for support.

Get a Secure Grip

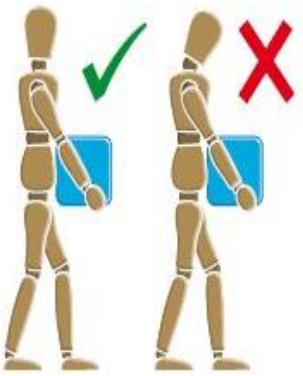
Hold the load as close to your body as possible to reduce strain. When possible, hug the object rather than relying solely on grip strength to prevent slipping or sudden strain.

Lift Smoothly and Avoid Strain



Do not arch or bend your back further while lifting. Straighten your legs in a controlled motion, keeping the load close to your waist. The heaviest side of the load should always remain closest to your body. If an object is too far to lift safely, slide it towards yourself before lifting.

Avoid Twisting or Leaning



Avoid twisting your back or leaning sideways, particularly when carrying a heavy load. If you need to turn, move your feet instead of twisting your torso. When lifting from a surface, slide the load to the edge before lifting to reduce strain. Keep shoulders and hips aligned throughout the movement.

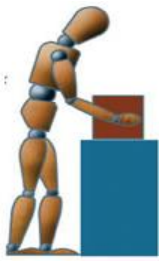
Keep Your Head Up

Once the load is secure, look ahead rather than down to maintain balance and ensure a clear line of sight.

Move with Control

Lift and carry the load smoothly. Jerky or sudden movements can cause a loss of control and increase the risk of injury.

Know Your Limits



Never attempt to lift or handle more than you can comfortably manage. There is no legally defined maximum weight, as individual capabilities vary based on strength, fitness level, and any underlying medical conditions. If in doubt, seek assistance or use appropriate lifting aids.

Place the Load Down Safely

If precise positioning of the load is needed, place it down first before adjusting its position. Ensure it is secure and stable to prevent tipping, rolling, or creating an obstruction.

4.2. Alternative Lifting Techniques

In some situations, space constraints, unusual load shapes, or personal physical limitations may prevent the use of standard lifting techniques. The following alternative methods can help reduce the risk of injury while ensuring safe handling.

Semi-Squat Technique

This method is similar to the standard lifting technique but requires less knee bending. The back remains straight but is no longer fully upright, with the arms positioned inside the legs. This approach is particularly beneficial for individuals with knee problems or when lifting small crates, trays, or boxes with handles.



To use this technique safely:

- Stand close to the load with feet slightly wider than in a traditional leg lift.
- Bend the knees without exceeding a 90-degree angle and keep heels on the ground.
- Maintain a straight back, but not as upright as in a full leg lift.
- Keep the head and neck in a neutral position and avoid looking down, as this encourages stooping.
- Secure a firm grip using the whole palm and fingers when possible.
- Keep the load close to the body to prevent overextension.
- Lift smoothly, avoiding any twisting movements.

Loading and Unloading Car Boots

Deep car boot spaces can make lifting and removing loads more awkward. If you frequently transport heavy or bulky items, consider keeping a foldable trolley and a protective material, such as an old rug, in the boot to assist with handling.

For safe loading and unloading:

- Place a protective covering over the car bumper and boot edge to reduce friction and prevent damage.
- Bend the knees and brace them against the car while keeping feet apart in a stable position.
- Secure a firm grip with both hands before lifting.
- Slide the load over the protective material to reduce strain and avoid twisting.
- When lifting out heavy items, use leg, buttock, and core muscles to control the movement.



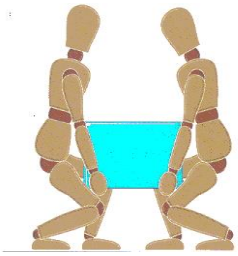
Loading and Unloading Shelving

When placing items on shelves, avoid overloading or overstretching, particularly when working at height. To reduce the risk of injury:

- Position heavier loads at waist height whenever possible.
- Hold loads close to the body to maintain control.
- Avoid reaching below knee height; use a kick stool when necessary.
- Refrain from reaching above shoulder height unless necessary.
- Use appropriate equipment, such as steps with a handrail and fenced platform, for high shelving rather than kick stools, particularly when handling heavier items.
- Never climb onto shelving or attempt to lift while holding a load. Instead, place items at an intermediate height first or ask a colleague for assistance.
- If precise positioning of the load is required, place it down first, then slide it into place. When removing items, slide them forward before lifting.

4.3. Dual or Team Lifts

When two or more people are required to lift an object, planning is essential. The load, task, and physical capabilities of each team member must be considered. The more people involved, the less weight everyone can safely handle. For large or bulky items, mechanical aids should always be considered as the first option.



For a safe team lift:

- Ensure the load has evenly spaced, secure grip points.
- Check that the weight is balanced to prevent one person from bearing a disproportionate amount of the load.
- If possible, work with individuals of similar height and build.
- Confirm that all team members understand the lifting technique and route before beginning.
- Designate one person to give clear signals, such as "one, two, three, lift/down," to coordinate movement.
- Avoid lifting or lowering before the signal, as this can cause imbalance and uneven weight distribution.
- Maintain a stable stance, secure grip, and bent knees while lifting, keeping the load close to the body and avoiding twisting.

5. Further information

5.1. Related HSE Guidance:

Further general guidance on Manual Handling Lifting Techniques can be found on Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Manual Handling -Good Handling Technique

5.2. Related University documents:

- HS094 Code of Practice - Manual Handling
- HS102 Guidance for pushing and pulling loads
- HS103 Guidance for handling cylinders and long / narrow loads

- Risk Management and Risk Assessment

5.3. Other related guidance:

- Making the best use of lifting and handling aids-HSE
- Managing Upper Limb Disorders in the Workplace-HSE
- Manual Handling Assessment Charts (the MAC tool)-HSE
- Risk Assessment of Pushing and Pulling (RAPP) Toll -HSE

6. Document History

Details of previous three reviews are as follows:

Review Date	Reviewer	Summary of Review
02-08-2022	Jo Harrington (H&S Adviser)	Annual review – no changes
Aug-2023	Jo Harrington (H&S Adviser)	Annual review – no changes
16-10-2025	Michelle Appiah-Agyekum (H&S Adviser)	Transferred to new document template. Removed 'STOP' acronym.
29-10-2026	Chantelle Marriott Health & Safety Advisor	Updated Logo and revision number

This document will be reviewed at least annually hereafter.