

# Better Backs campaign

A national campaign to tackle back pain and upper limb disorders at work

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**W**elcome to the new **Better Backs stakeholder pack**. It is the third pack of its kind, following the packs which accompanied our **Backs! 2005** and **Better Backs 2006** campaigns. Those of you familiar with these earlier packs will recognise several elements in this new version, including guidance on how to prevent manual handling injuries in the workplace, and how to manage back pain more generally by 'staying active' and staying in work.

But we have also taken the opportunity to revise and update such guidance, where appropriate, with a view to the pack remaining current throughout this year (2007/08) and next. In particular, we have extended the scope of the pack to cover both back pain **and** ULDs (upper limb disorders) by including:

- two new ULD-related checklists: one on ULDs in the workplace and the other a VDU (visual display unit) workstation checklist;
- a new ULD PowerPoint presentation, as part of a new-look stakeholder CD.

In short, we have tried to make the pack more flexible and versatile, and to extend its coverage to a wider range of MSDs (musculoskeletal disorders) than ever before. In doing so, we hope the pack will be of increased benefit to employers, employees and safety representatives alike, and a valuable resource for those of you planning to organise MSD initiatives – whether 'in house' or further afield – in the coming months.

We do hope this pack meets your needs. If it doesn't, however, or if you see scope for further improvement, do please let us know – a new FREEPOST evaluation form is included for this purpose.

## What is Better Backs?

Better Backs is a national publicity, inspection, and stakeholder campaign that has been running since 2005. This year, 2007/08, the campaign will again focus on reducing cases of back pain caused or made worse by work, and the numbers of working days lost due to back pain. Additionally, as noted above, the campaign will start broadening its focus to include MSDs as well.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and local authorities will once again, as part of the campaign, work together on a series of inspection initiatives and organise a range of events for stakeholders (unfortunately, this year we are unable to fund any third-party stakeholder events). But, equally importantly, we encourage stakeholders themselves to continue taking the lead in organising their own events and promoting and implementing the advice in this pack.

## Why is there a campaign?

Because MSDs, including back pain and ULDs, remain the largest cause of occupational ill health. This means a lot of suffering for working people, and major problems for business as well. It is an immense challenge but, as Better Backs has already shown, real improvements can be made if we all work together. That is why the contribution of you, our stakeholders, is so important – thank you for everything you have already done for Better Backs and do please help us ensure it goes from strength to strength in the months ahead.

## What is the extent of the problem?\*

### In 2005/06:

- two million people in Great Britain suffered work-related ill health;
- half of these people suffered MSDs;
- MSDs accounted for nearly 10 million working days lost;
- people suffering a work-related MSD took an average 17 days off work.

\* Source: *Self-reported Work-related Illness (SWI) Survey 2005/06*

## What do employers need to do?

- Plan to keep in touch with staff who are off work, encourage them to stay active if they have back pain and help them return to work.
- Identify activities which present a risk and examine how these can be made safer.
- Prioritise action, sort out the things that will have most impact first.
- Keep it simple, choose sensible approaches and solutions.
- Check solutions for new risks, eg excessive pushing/pulling, poor posture, vehicle movements.
- Involve workers or their representatives in:
  - assessing risk;
  - choosing solutions;
  - monitoring and feeding back on how well solutions work;
  - helping those with back pain remain active and stay in work.

## What is in the pack?

The pack contains the following material:

- **Information sheet 1:** This introductory sheet.
- **Information sheet 2:** *Getting to grips with manual handling: A short guide* gives help on assessment, pushing and pulling, handling technique and the law.\*\*
- **Information sheet 3:** *Lifting and handling aids: Advice for employers* shows the types of handling aids

available for a wide range of tasks and includes information on what to consider when choosing handling aids.

■ **Information sheet 4:** *Upper limb disorders in the workplace: Risk factor checklist* will help you carry out workplace assessments of repetitive handling tasks.\*\*

■ **Information sheet 5:** *VDU workstation checklist: Checklist for safety representatives* sets out a range of risk factors to look out for when assessing DSE (Display Screen Equipment) work.\*\*

■ **Information sheet 6:** *Staying active and returning to work: Advice for workers* explains how staying active can help you manage your back pain and your life. This is evidence-based advice supported by health professionals.

■ **Information sheet 7:** *A short guide to managing sickness absence and return to work: Advice for employers* explains what you can do to manage sickness absence and return to work, and how this can benefit both your employees and their business.

■ **Information sheet 8:** *Manual handling training courses* explains how you can get the best from manual handling training courses (should you decide, having taken all other measures to avoid or control manual handling, that they are the only way of further reducing the manual handling risks to your staff).

■ **Evaluation sheet:** *Please tell us what you think* invites you to complete a short questionnaire about the pack and to return it to us FREEPOST.

■ Finally, the pack also includes the new **Better Backs CD**, containing all the sheets described above, together with a range of PowerPoint presentations and speakers' notes on back pain and ULDs.

\*\* These three checklists are multi-purpose and are similar to those provided to safety representatives as part of MSD Euroweek 2007 (details at [www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/euroweek](http://www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/euroweek)).

## Want to know more?

For information about back pain and other musculoskeletal disorders, visit: [www.hse.gov.uk/msd](http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd)

For information about the Better Backs campaign, visit: [www.hse.gov.uk/msd/campaigns](http://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/campaigns)

Or call HSE's Infoline on 0845 345 0055 for further information