

# Neck and Back Pain at Work



Occupational Safety and Health Branch  
Labour Department

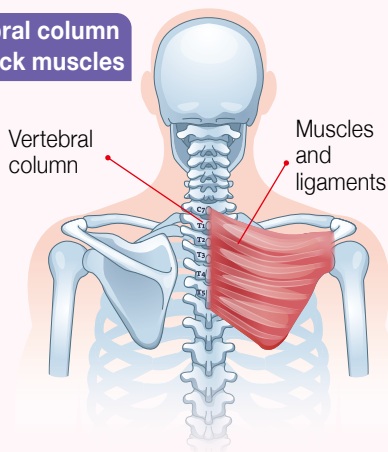


# Introduction

Neck and back pain is common nowadays. Working with a poor posture may hurt our neck and back, and affect our performance at work. In severe cases, work ability may be compromised. This pamphlet aims at introducing the common work-related causes of neck and back pain as well as their preventive measures.

## Structure and Functions of Neck and Back

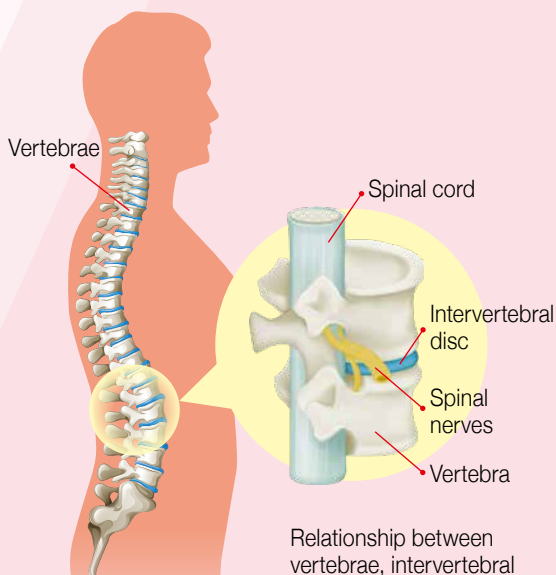
### Vertebral column and back muscles



Neck and back are composed of the vertebral column, intervertebral discs, muscles, ligaments, spinal cord and spinal nerves.

### Side view of vertebral column

- The vertebral column protects the spinal cord and supports our body
- The spinal cord and spinal nerves are responsible for the transmission of nerve impulses, control muscle activities and sensation
- An intervertebral disc lies between two vertebrae and acts as a shock absorber to protect the spinal cord
- Ligaments attach vertebrae together and allow certain movements of the back
- Neck and back muscles support our body and provide motor function



# Common Causes of Neck and Back Pain at Work

## 1. Working Environment

- Slippery, uneven or unstable floor, poor lighting may increase the risk of falling or tripping
- Crowded environment, obstructed pathways and space constraint make it difficult for employees to apply a good posture in manual handling
- Lack of appropriate mechanical aids may increase the burden on workers and the risk of back injuries or strains

## 2. Working Posture

- Poor workstation design
- Poor working habit
- Maintaining the same posture for prolonged period of time

- Cradling handset between head and shoulder
- Dangling both feet



- Inappropriate height of working table and chair
- Insufficient legroom



- Overstretching upper limbs and back
- Prolonged backward tilting of neck



### 3. Manual Handling Operations

- Sudden and drastic movements or improper lifting techniques for heavy loads, such as objects, people or animals, may sprain or tear the muscles and ligaments
- In severe cases, it may even cause the intervertebral disc to herniate and compress the spinal cord or spinal nerves, leading to pain, numbness or even paralysis

- Twisting back while lifting heavy load



- Bending back while lifting heavy load



# Preventive Measures

## 1. Conduct Risk Assessment

- Employers should conduct risk assessments to all types of work such as manual handling operations and use of display screen equipment
  - Identify the hazards at work
  - Evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of existing preventive measures
  - Formulate and adopt appropriate preventive measures

## 2. Adopt Appropriate Preventive Measures

- Good housekeeping
  - Provide a safe working environment, such as flat and dry floor and adequate lighting, to minimise the occurrence of accidents
  - Ensure adequate working space
  - Place frequently used or heavy objects at an easy-reach level, such as at the waist level to avoid workers from overstretching of upper limbs and back, or bending over
- Appropriate equipment and accessories
  - Match the chairs and working desks with work nature and the body build of workers
  - Provide appropriate assistive aids



## Good posture

- Maintaining a proper sitting and standing posture can keep the muscles in a balanced position and minimise the stress in the spine
- Change working posture regularly to avoid maintaining the same posture for prolonged period of time

Resting both feet flat on the floor



Leaning the back against backrest tightly

Chin in  
Chest up  
Tummy in

Ear, shoulder and ankle forming a straight line



## Correct manual handling operations

- Use assistive aids or devices when lifting loads to decrease the risk of manual lifting
- Adopt correct postures and techniques in manual lifting
- Workers can choose team lifting according to the size and weight of the object and personal ability. Pay attention to coordination and command



Knees bent



Keeping the load close to the body

Back straight



Rising up slowly with the thighs



No rapid movement or back twisting

## Job rotation

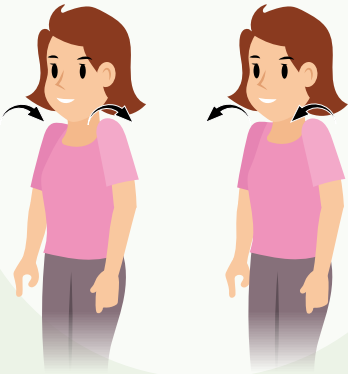
- Regular rotation of jobs or processes allows different muscles of the body to rest and reduce strain

### 3. Healthy Lifestyle

- Adequate rest and sleep
- Well-balanced diet
- Regular physical activities

Regular exercise enhances the muscle strength and flexibility. The following examples are listed for reference:

- Stretching exercise
  1. Roll shoulders backwards 10 times
  2. Roll shoulders forwards 10 times

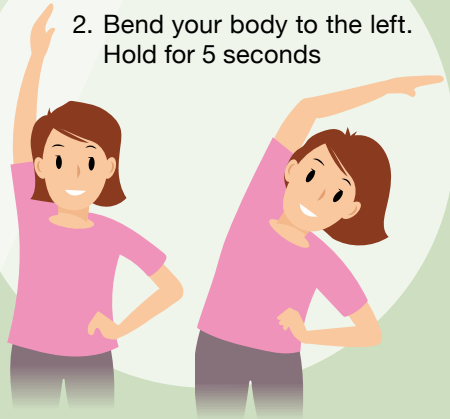


- Strengthening exercise
  1. Lie on back with knees bent
  2. Lift the buttock and hold for 5 seconds. Return to starting position
  3. Repeat this exercise 5 times

1. Place hands on lower back
2. Slowly bend upper body backwards. Hold for 5 seconds



1. Raise right arm and place left arm at waist
2. Bend your body to the left. Hold for 5 seconds



## Enquiries

If you wish to enquire about this pamphlet or require advice on occupational safety and health (OSH) matters, please contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department (LD) through:

Telephone: 2852 4041 or  
2559 2297 (auto-recording service available outside office hours)

Fax: 2581 2049

E-mail: [enquiry@labour.gov.hk](mailto:enquiry@labour.gov.hk)

Information on the services offered by the LD and on major labour legislation is also available on our website at <https://www.labour.gov.hk>. For details on the services offered by the Occupational Safety and Health Council, please call 2739 9000.



Labour Department's  
Website

## Occupational Health Clinics of the Labour Department

Any workers who suspected to have contracted occupational diseases, work injuries or work-related illnesses, can call or visit the Occupational Health Clinics for appointment booking. Doctor's referral is not required.

- Kwun Tong Occupational Health Clinic Telephone: 2343 7133
- Fanling Occupational Health Clinic Telephone: 3543 5701



Occupational Health  
Clinics

## Complaints

If you have any complaints about unsafe operations and environments at workplaces, please call the LD's OSH complaint hotline at 2542 2172 or fill out and submit an online OSH complaint form on our website. All complaints will be treated in the strictest confidence.



Online OSH  
Complaint Form

This pamphlet is issued free of charge and can be obtained from offices of the Occupational Health Service or downloaded from the Labour Department's website at [https://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2\\_9.htm](https://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2_9.htm). For enquiries on addresses and telephone numbers of the offices, please visit the Labour Department's website at <https://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/tele/osh.htm> or call 2852 4041.

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