

Guide on Rest Breaks



Labour Department
Occupational Safety and Health Branch

Labour Advisory Board

Committee on Occupational Safety and Health


Occupational Safety & Health Council

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<http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/os/B129.exe>.

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Introduction

1. Rest breaks are important for employees, employers and the self-employed. One must have energy to perform a job well. This Guide aims to draw the attention of employers and employees to the importance of rest breaks and encourages them to work out through consultation rest break arrangements suitable for the employees as well as meeting operational needs of the business. Although this Guide does not have a legal binding effect, it recommends that all employers should adopt the best practice of working out, in consultation with their employees, a rest break arrangement for all workers after a continuous period of work. This Guide reminds employers who have not yet made proper arrangements for rest breaks to do so in consultation with their employees.
2. Working long hours continuously without any break causes fatigue as well as safety and health problems. Fatigue impairs an employee's ability to perform. It also affects one's judgment, productivity, work efficiency and quality. Fatigue may even lead to serious occupational accidents resulting in injury to persons, loss of lives and properties and also affecting the business operation. Occupational accidents would bring about higher insurance premium and increase operating costs, thus undermining the interests of employers, employees, and the self-employed.



3. Appropriate rest breaks are important to the safety and health of employees and self-employed persons. For some occupations, such as the full-time drivers, fatigue may cause serious traffic accidents endangering not only the drivers themselves but also other people as well. Office staff also need to take a rest after performing long hours of work, which will be beneficial to their eye sight. Some people e.g. data-input computer operators may suffer from tenosynovitis as a result of repetitive high speed keying process in computer operation. Watching display screen equipment for long hours may also cause eyestrain and fatigue.

Duties of Employers and Employees

4. A short break after a long period of continuous work provides a chance for employees to relax and recuperate. It helps to improve their performance and quality of service, foster better employer-employee relationship and motivate employees to give their best performance. Every person shall arrange himself a rest break after a long period of work. Employers should be open-minded and work out, in consultation with their employees, an appropriate rest break arrangement.





5. Section 6 of the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Chapter 509) requires that an employer shall ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the safety and health of their employees at work. With a few exceptions, such as self-employed persons and drivers, the Ordinance protects all employees, including the hourly-rated and piece-rated workers, and part-time employees. Since appropriate rest breaks are closely related to the safety and health of employees, employers should work out with their employees the most suitable rest break arrangement to cope with the business operation and to provide quality service. For establishments with workplace communication mechanism (including safety committees), employers should make use of such mechanism to seek the views of employees on the rest break arrangement.

6. Employers and employees should cooperate and follow the rest break arrangement they worked out through consultation. Employers should facilitate employees to take their rest breaks, and employees should resume work promptly after a rest break.
7. Self-employed persons may overlook the importance of rest breaks because of heavy workload or due to the desire to earn more. However, a burnt-out and worn-out person would hardly be able to provide quality service, but instead is more prone to accidents. Suitable rest breaks are beneficial to one's business as well as to one's safety and health.

Rest Break

8. A rest break is a break from work within working hours, during which an employee can have a meal or take a rest. The Employment of Children Regulations and the Employment of Young Persons (Industry) Regulations made under the Employment Ordinance, Chapter 57, govern working hours of children¹ and young persons² who are entitled to have one-hour and half-hour rest breaks respectively after working continuously for five hours.



¹ 'Child' means a person under the age of 15 years

² 'Young person' means a person who had attained the age of 15 years but not the age of 18 years



9. The practice of having rest breaks in a working day is common in Hong Kong. Usually, one-hour meal break is available for full-time employees. For manual work requiring a lot of physical energy, e.g. in construction, a trade practice of taking short breaks in the morning and afternoon sessions is usually in place. The catering trade allows employees to take rest breaks during non-peak business hours so as to prepare them for the next wave of heavy workload. In estate management, rest breaks are often arranged by rotation. These are all good examples for our reference.
10. Some occupations and trades, however, may not have specified rest breaks because of their unique business nature or the scale of operation. Under these circumstances, employers should work out in consultation with their employees a suitable rest break arrangement that would allow employees to take appropriate rest without affecting the business operation.



11. For workers who are engaged in hazardous or strenuous work processes, such as work involving exposure to high temperature, steam or vibration, or work expending a lot of energy as in manual handling of heavy objects, frequent rest breaks of shorter duration may be required provided that the safety of the workers and other persons is not affected.
12. Rest breaks are much more important to employees working in hot environment, for example: working close to hot stoves in kitchens of restaurants, canteens or food factories; or close to boilers in dyeing factories. Frequent rest breaks of shorter duration are even more important for these workers.

13. Furthermore, employees operating vibratory machines (such as soil compressor, chain saw, cement vibrator etc.), or those who are engaged in processes expending a lot of physical strength (such as bar bending, rigging and building demolition), will become tired more easily. Employers should arrange suitable rest breaks for these workers after they have worked continuously for a period of time.
14. For a shop operated by the owner himself or by a single employee, a notice showing the business hours in the day can be displayed at a prominent place. The shop owner should discuss with the employee to work out a suitable and flexible rest break arrangement.



Consultation between Employers and Employees

15. No single pattern of rest break arrangement can suit the divergent needs of a wide variety of trades and businesses. A suitable rest break arrangement is beneficial to the employer, the employee or in some cases even members of the public. Rest break arrangements worked out voluntarily between employers and employees through consultation will be the most appropriate measure to achieve this goal.

*Work hard, work smart,
with suitable rest breaks!*

Help Desk

16. If you have any enquiry on rest break arrangement, or if you need any assistance, please contact the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department through:

Telephone: 2559 2297 (auto recording after office hour)

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Appendix

Hectic life and busy work are common causes of muscle fatigue, resulting in soreness in neck, shoulder, back and limb. Prolonged disregard of these symptoms may result in overuse injuries. Regular exercise can keep you in good shape and improve your productivity.

The following pages are some examples of simple exercises targeted at different parts of the body. You may choose the appropriate types according to your needs. When you are doing the exercises.....

1. Check your physical condition before doing exercise. When you feel tired or any discomfort, stop exercising.
2. Choose the type of exercise that suits you and make sure the sporting area is spacious enough for your workout.
3. Don't wear close-tight clothes and high-heel shoes.
4. Perform the exercise slowly until you feel a stretch in your muscles. Stretching too much or too quickly will easily hurt your muscles and joints, that is especially the case when you are doing exercises related to neck, back and knees.
5. Perform the exercise according to your ability. Do not over-exert yourself.
6. Persistence is the key to good results.

NECK EXERCISE



1. Eyes looking forward. Turn your head to the left side. Hold for 5 seconds.



2. Return to the starting posture.



3. Turn your head to the right side and repeat the same movements.

4. Repeat the set of movements 5 times.

UPPER BACK AND SHOULDER EXERCISE



1. Raise your upper limbs to shoulder level and bend your elbows to 90 degrees.

2. Stretch your elbows backward as much as you can. Keep upright and breathe in deeply. Hold for 5 seconds. Note that your back should be kept straight and avoid tilting backward too much.



3. Close your forearms tightly in front of your chest when breathing out.



4. Repeat the set of movements 5 times.

UPPER LIMB EXERCISE



1. Spread out and straighten your fingers. Hold for 5-10 seconds.



2. Relax slowly.



3. Clench your fist tightly for 5-10 seconds.

4. Repeat the set of movements 10 times.

BACK EXERCISE

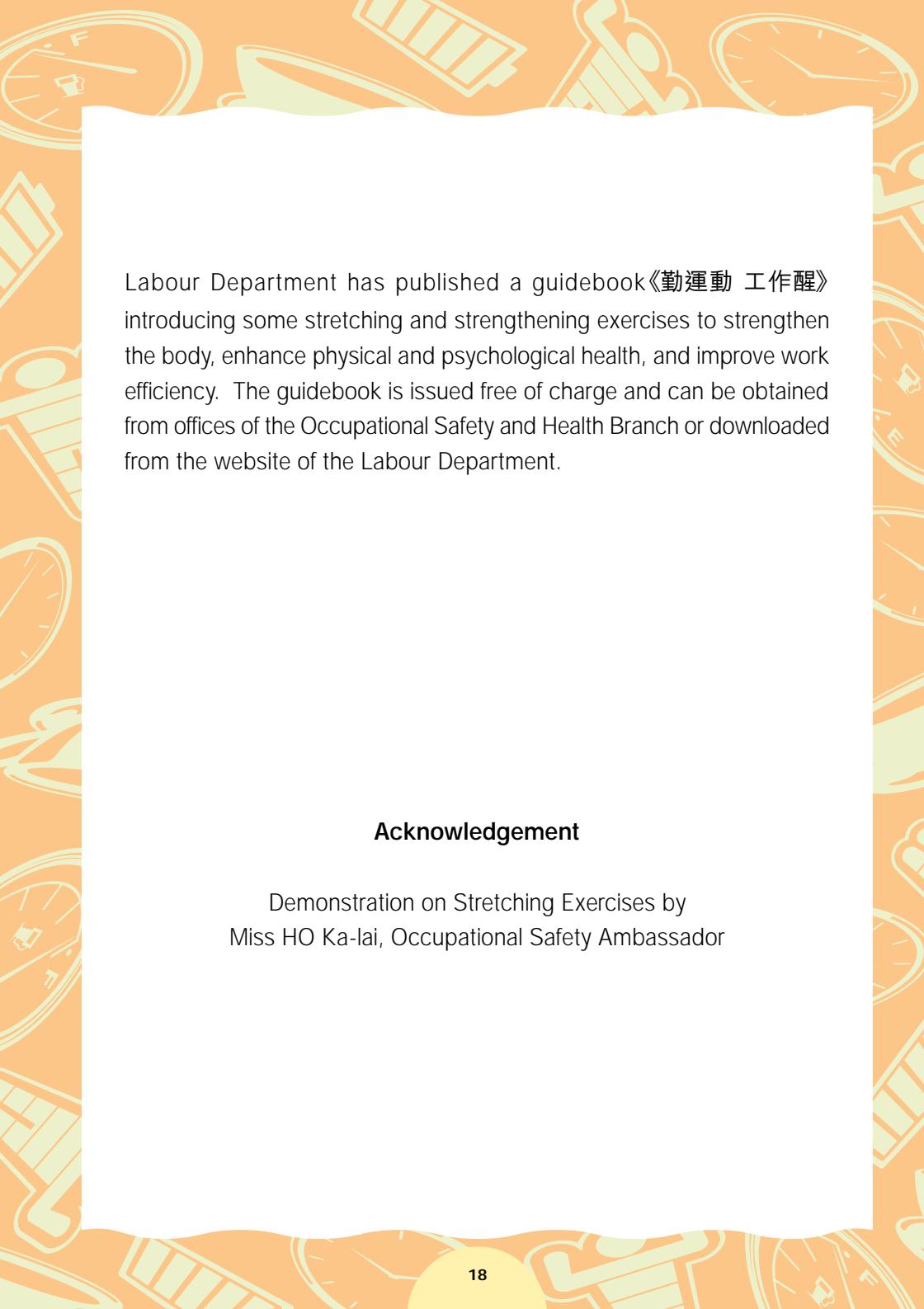
1. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Raise your left arm, place your right hand on the waist and bend to the right. Hold for 5 seconds.
2. Return to the upright posture.
3. Repeat on the left side.
4. Repeat the set of movements 5 times.



LOWER LIMB EXERCISE

1. Hold onto a stable object with your right hand. Use the left hand to pull the right lower leg towards your buttock. Hold for 5 seconds.
2. Repeat the movements with the right hand and the left leg.
3. Repeat the set of movements 5 times.





Labour Department has published a guidebook《勤運動 工作醒》introducing some stretching and strengthening exercises to strengthen the body, enhance physical and psychological health, and improve work efficiency. The guidebook is issued free of charge and can be obtained from offices of the Occupational Safety and Health Branch or downloaded from the website of the Labour Department.

Acknowledgement

Demonstration on Stretching Exercises by
Miss HO Ka-lai, Occupational Safety Ambassador