



**What are Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)?**

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are problems causing aches and pains in the muscles and joints such as arthritis, slipped discs, repetitive strain injury and a wide range of other conditions. Problems may develop over a long period of time or be the result of an injury.

Musculoskeletal problems affect people both at work and in their home life, reducing their participation in leisure activities, daily tasks, and disturbing sleep. Reduced physical activity can then impact on mental health as people miss out on social life and connections with people leading to feelings of loneliness.

When someone experiences an MSD problem it may be related to the way they are working, lifestyle choices or things that they do at home. We can do many things to reduce or prevent MSDs if we all make healthy lifestyle choices and all work together to identify ways to make improvements at work.



**What are the main causes at home and at work?**

- Being in the same posture for long periods of time e.g. sitting, standing, bending.
- Poor lifting and handling.
- Doing the same thing for too long without a break especially if it is repetitive, involves force, bent postures or working above shoulder height e.g. some work activities, sports, DIY, computer games or playing musical instruments.
- An increase in workload or activity levels.
- Stress can increase the risk by increasing muscle tension and causing people to rush.
- Previous injuries or health conditions can increase the risk.



**What can be done to reduce problems?**

A Royal Mail Group survey of colleagues showed that the best ways to reduce aches and pains at work are:

- Take your allocated breaks. Tired muscles and joints are more likely to become injured. Don't be tempted to carry too much or take shortcuts to finish quicker.
- Use the equipment provided to help you – follow the Safe Systems of Work and good lifting techniques. Speak to your manager if you haven't had manual handling training in the last three years.



- Where possible, rotate between different tasks and change your working methods to rest muscles. Change between hands for scanning; move between loading and unloading machines; move between sorting and portering; and sitting and standing.
- Ensure that your footwear is comfortable; you may find more supportive or cushioned insoles help.

Prevention is better than cure; we all have a responsibility to take ownership for our health.

**Look after your health and wellbeing by:**

- **Getting regular exercise** – being active can improve your mobility, flexibility, strength and energy levels. In our survey, swimming, yoga and gyms were found particularly helpful by colleagues for reducing aches and pains. Other popular ways to keep fit are cycling, walking and exercise classes. Maintaining exercise is often more achievable if you find something you enjoy or do something with other people.
- **Stretching and moving throughout the day** – this helps to reduce aches and pains by relieving muscle tension and improving posture.
- **Eating a balanced diet** – eating and drinking healthily will give you all the nutrients and water you need and help you to maintain healthy bones and joints.



- **staying a healthy weight** – if you're overweight, losing weight can really help you to reduce aches and pains by reducing the pressure on your joints and muscles.
- **Make sure you get enough sleep** – this is when your muscles and joints recover from the day's activities.
- **Reduce stress** – give yourself time to relax, unwind and enjoy life. This will help to reduce muscle tension.

**Remember**

If your MSD problem was related to work you should think about ways to prevent it from recurring

- Think through the possible causes and think about how you can change what you do or how you do it.
- Check that you understand Safe Systems of Work or guidance for the tasks that you do, take your breaks and use the equipment provided to help you.

Being off work can cause you to become isolated, inactive and develop mental health problems that can delay recovery. Staying in contact with your manager and friends at work and keeping up to date with what is happening can make a big difference. It's a good idea to visit for briefings or to see colleagues even if you are not fit to carry out your duties.



**Getting help**

- Discuss any concerns with your manager so that changes to the way you work or the tasks you carry out can be reviewed.
- If you have aches and pains you are concerned about, see your GP.
- Your GP may refer you for physiotherapy. In some areas you can refer yourself for NHS physiotherapy either online or on the phone.
- If you have Beneden or other private healthcare they may be able to provide you with physiotherapy or osteopathy.

## On-site gyms

Royal Mail Group gyms are available at some sites. Check [www.royalmailfitness.co.uk](http://www.royalmailfitness.co.uk) to see if there is one nearby.

## Discount available

For discounted gym memberships and exercise classes through MyBundle visit the link [rmg.incorpore.co.uk/members](http://rmg.incorpore.co.uk/members) and login as RMG to find out more.

## Local activities

Check out your local sports and social clubs to see what activities are being organised, or why not just arrange a regular walk, cycle or other activity with your friends? There are lots of activities and support groups to be found online or via your local library or community centre.

If you have a sedentary job it is a good idea to build more exercise into your normal day by walking or cycling to work, using the stairs instead of the lift, walking at lunchtime and stretching during the day.



## Other support and information

Feeling First Class for ideas on taking up a healthy lifestyle to help manage musculoskeletal symptoms and stress. Use the code FFC1 to sign up on the site [www.feelingfirstclass.co.uk](http://www.feelingfirstclass.co.uk)

For more information about conditions, helpful exercises and to manage pain visit [www.arthritisresearchuk.org](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org)

First Class - Support is a 24/7, free and confidential helpline for employees for advice on physical or mental health problems please visit [www.rmgfirstclasssupport.co.uk](http://www.rmgfirstclasssupport.co.uk)



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