Incorrect manual handling is one of the most common causes of injury at work. It causes work-related musculoskeletal disorders which account for over a third of all workplace injuries. Most of these are preventable.

Manual Handling of Loads Regulations 1992:
- Avoid the need for hazardous manual handling wherever possible
- Assess the risk of injury from any hazardous manual handling that can’t be avoided
- Reduce the risk of injury from hazardous manual handling, so far as is reasonably practicable

Reduce risks by:
- Dividing up the load
- Getting someone to help
- Using a trolley
- Wearing gloves / protective clothing / flat shoes

Know your capabilities!
Don’t lift if the task is beyond your physical capabilities. Avoid lifting if you are pregnant or if you have a medical condition that could affect your ability to handle loads.

Good handling technique for lifting:

1. Plan
Plan the lift. Can handling aids be used? Where is the load going to be placed? Will help be needed with the load? Remove obstructions. For a long lift, consider resting the load midway on a table to change grip.

2. Adopt a stable position
The feet should be apart with one leg slightly forward to maintain balance (alongside the load, if it is on the ground).

3. Get a good hold
Where possible, the load should be hugged as close as possible to the body.

4. Start in a good posture
At the start of the lift, slight bending of the back, hips and knees is preferable to fully flexing the back (stooping) or fully flexing the hips and knees (squatting).

5. Don’t flex the back any further while lifting
This can happen if the legs begin to straighten before starting to raise the load.

6. Keep the load close to the waist
Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the body. If a close approach to the load is not possible, try to slide it towards the body before attempting to lift it.

7. Avoid twisting the back or leaning sideways, especially while the back is bent. Shoulders should be kept level and facing in the same direction as the hips. Turning by moving the feet is better than twisting and lifting at the same time.

8. Keep the head up when handling
Once held securely, look ahead, not down at the load.

9. Move smoothly
The load should not be jerked or snatched as this can make it harder to keep control, increasing the risk of injury.

10. Don’t lift more than can be easily managed
There is a difference between what people can lift and what they can safely lift. If in doubt, seek advice or get help.

11. Put down, then adjust
If precise positioning of the load is necessary, put it down first, then slide it into the desired position.