

WORK RELATED STRAIN & VIBRATION



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AN INTRODUCTION TO CLAIMING COMPENSATION: WORK RELATED STRAIN & VIBRATION

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

Workers may develop a range of conditions due to repetitive work activities, heavy manual tasks, or prolonged use of vibrating tools.

These are often referred to as work-related strain and vibration injuries, and can have a significant impact on daily life and ability to work.

This booklet provides a basic outline of:

- The main types of strain and vibration-related conditions
- Who may be affected
- What causes these injuries
- The legal duties of employers
- What steps workers should take
- Time limits for bringing a claim



WHO CAN BE AFFECTED BY WORK RELATED STRAIN AND VIBRATION INJURIES

These conditions can affect anyone whose work involves repetitive movements, forceful tasks, or exposure to vibrating equipment.

Workers most at risk include:

- Construction and demolition workers
- Joiners, carpenters, and labourers
- Road workers and groundworkers
- Factory and production line workers
- Mechanics and engineers
- Cleaners, packers, and assembly workers
- Workers regularly using power tools (e.g. drills, grinders, chainsaws)

In many cases, symptoms develop gradually over time due to repeated exposure.

WHAT TYPES OF INJURIES ARE COVERED?

This booklet focuses on three common work-related conditions:

Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) / Vibration White Finger

A condition caused by prolonged use of vibrating tools, affecting blood vessels, nerves, and joints in the hands and arms.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

A condition affecting the wrist, caused by pressure on a nerve that controls movement and sensation in the hand.

Dupuytren's Contracture

A condition affecting the hand, where tissue beneath the skin thickens, causing fingers to bend towards the palm.

These conditions may occur individually or alongside each other depending on the nature of the work.

WHAT CAUSES THESE CONDITIONS?

Work-related strain and vibration injuries are typically caused by repeated stress or exposure over time.

Key contributing factors include:

- Prolonged use of vibrating tools or machinery
- Repetitive hand and wrist movements
- Forceful gripping or awkward hand positions
- Lack of proper rest breaks
- Poor workplace ergonomics

Failure to provide appropriate protective equipment

Key features:

- Conditions usually develop gradually over months or years
- Symptoms may worsen with continued exposure
- Early signs are often overlooked or dismissed
- Some damage may be permanent if not addressed early

WHICH PARTS OF THE BODY ARE AFFECTED?

These conditions primarily affect the hands, wrists, and arms, although the exact impact depends on the condition.

Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS):

- Affects blood vessels, nerves, and joints
- Commonly impacts fingers and hands
- Can affect circulation and sensation

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome:

- Affects the median nerve in the wrist
- Impacts hand movement and sensation
- Often affects thumb, index, and middle fingers

Dupuytren's Contracture:

- Affects tissue beneath the skin in the palm
- Causes tightening and thickening of the tissue
- Leads to reduced finger movement over time
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WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms vary depending on the condition, but commonly include:

General symptoms:

- Pain, discomfort, or stiffness in the hands or wrists
- Reduced grip strength
- Difficulty carrying out everyday tasks

HAVS / Vibration White Finger:

- Tingling or numbness in the fingers
- Fingers turning white in cold conditions
- Loss of sensation or coordination

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome:

- Pins and needles in the fingers
- Weakness in the hand
- Difficulty gripping or holding objects

Dupuytren's Contracture:

- Thickened or lumpy tissue in the palm
- Fingers gradually bending towards the palm
- Reduced ability to fully straighten fingers

Symptoms often worsen if exposure continues without intervention.

WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYERS DO?

What should employers do?

Employers have a duty to protect workers from strain and vibration-related injuries.

This includes:

- Assessing risks associated with vibration and repetitive tasks
- Reducing exposure to vibrating tools and repetitive work
- Providing appropriate protective equipment and tools
- Ensuring proper training and supervision
- Introducing safe systems of work and regular breaks

Monitoring workers for early signs of injury

Where employers fail to take these steps, they (or their insurers) may be held liable if their negligence has caused or contributed to a worker's condition.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

If you believe you have developed a work-related strain or vibration injury, you should:

- Seek medical advice as soon as possible
- Report your symptoms to your employer
- Keep a record of your work duties and exposure
- Seek legal advice to understand your position

Early action can help prevent symptoms from worsening and protect your right to bring a claim.

TIME LIMITS

In Scotland, strict time limits apply to claims:

A claim must generally be raised within 3 years of becoming aware of the condition and its possible link to your work

Important points:

- If the time limit is missed, the claim may be time-barred
- This can prevent you from pursuing compensation
- It is therefore important to seek legal advice early

LEGAL POSITION IN SCOTLAND

Under Scots law, work-related strain and vibration injuries may give rise to a claim where they have been caused by unsafe working conditions or exposure.

This means:

- Individuals affected may be entitled to compensation
- Claims depend on establishing employer responsibility and exposure
- Each case will depend on its individual facts, including the nature and duration of the work

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