

# 10 TOP TIPS

## PREVENTING MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS WHEN WORKING IN EARLY YEARS

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) affect muscles, joints and bones. Cumulative strain builds up over time (e.g. back ache and knee pain). Injuries can happen suddenly (e.g. pulled neck). Research shows early education and childcare workers are exposed to significant risks to their musculoskeletal health: 98% of those surveyed reported pain while carrying out their roles\*



### 1. IDENTIFY POTENTIAL MSDs EARLY

Low level working environments can be challenging for adults. The most effective way to prevent longer term MSDs is recognising aches and pains and taking early action to remedy them.

### 6. ASSESS WORKING ENVIRONMENTS


Risks factors of MSD's include stooping, kneeling, lifting, working in small spaces, sitting on the floor or using children's chairs. Think how you can maintain a healthier posture in these tasks. Get comfortable before you begin and adjust your position if you start to feel pain - ideally before you start to feel uncomfortable. Explore ergonomic equipment and seek low-height working guidance for support. Consider home working and outdoor learning set ups too. And remember to report any aches and pains early so they can be addressed.

### 2. RECOGNISE CONNECTION TO MENTAL HEALTH



MSDs are more common when we are mentally stressed: subconsciously we tense up making us move more awkwardly. Our sleep and physical recovery can also be affected. Furthermore, when we're in pain, our morale, mood and patience are affected, leading to additional stress and a potentially a cycle of discomfort and distress. Pain can make us hesitant to move, when actually our bodies thrive on moving well.

### 7. INVEST IN MOVING AND HANDLING TRAINING

Manual handling legislation explains duties for employers and employees to help prevent injuries. Training helps your setting remain compliant, supporting safety and health of employees and safeguarding children in your care. 

### 3. FOCUS ON POSTURAL AWARENESS

Understanding how to move well can help us go about our day pain free. It also aids other bodily functions, such as digestion, circulation and breathing. When we are regularly active and move well, tasks become easier, we feel healthier and have more energy at the end of the day.

### 8. PLAN FOR "AT RISK" EMPLOYEES

Workers who are pregnant, returning to work or with pre-existing medical conditions are especially vulnerable to MSK strain and injury. Assessing, reducing and reviewing MSK risks is vital to ensure safety and wellbeing of employees.

### 4. WELLNESS MATTERS

Hydration and a healthy diet significantly benefit our MSK system. Drink plenty of water throughout the day, rather than volumes after work. This will help reduce night time trips to the toilet which disturb your sleep. Good sleep is needed for MSK recovery and repair.

### 9. ADOPT AN "MSK HEALTHY" APPROACH

Together with increased awareness and training, developing an "MSK healthy" approach ensures an organisation has healthier, happier and safer educators and carers. This, combined with less pain, an elevated mood and larger reserves of energy, will aid outcomes for children.

### 5. EMBRACE BEING ACTIVE

Regular physical activity strengthens and mobilises joints, muscles and bones. It helps balance our MSK system, contributes to a healthy posture and aids recovery from injuries.



### 10. SPEAK TO YOUR MANAGER

Report MSD symptoms early. If you are experiencing aches and pains, it's possible other colleagues could be too. Nothing can be done however if problems are kept hidden. Pain shouldn't be "part of the job" and preventing MSDs is possible with a cooperative approach and effective, empathetic leadership. External MSK health support is available.

Good Musculoskeletal (MSK) health is essential for our overall health and wellbeing. Early identification, postural awareness and some simple steps can make big improvements to your MSK health and workplace safety - in addition to benefitting children in your care.



Lorna Taylor is a specialist education physiotherapist. She passionately founded Jolly Back in 2010 to provide resources and products to specifically support the early years and primary workforce.

[www.jollyback.com](http://www.jollyback.com)

\*Science Direct research [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0925753524001826](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0925753524001826)