



HEALTH INFORMATION

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)

Regular use of hand operated tools and machinery producing high levels of vibration may develop a painful condition known as hand arm vibration syndrome or vibration white finger. This results in a cold induced – marble white appearance on the area's most in close contact with the vibrating tool parts. The attacks are uncomfortable however, symptoms can improve if withdrawn from exposure.

Employees with severe advanced disease are less likely to improve. There is no well established satisfactory treatment however, wearing warm gloves, avoiding vibration and wet or draughty conditions help to alleviate some symptoms. The Vibration at Work Regulations 2005 gives guidance on exposure limits and the onus on employers to assess the risk. Health surveillance is mandatory for those who are exposed above a certain limit to check the effectiveness of workplace controls.

How do I protect myself?

It is the employer's responsibility to protect employees against HAVS and carpal tunnel syndrome, your employer should consider if the job could be done in a different way without using vibrating tools and machines.

If this cannot happen:

- Use suitable low-vibration tools
- Always use the right tool for each job (to do the job more quickly and expose you to less hand-arm vibration)
- Check tools before using them to make sure they have been properly maintained and repaired to avoid increased vibration caused by faults or general wear

- Make sure cutting tools are kept sharp so that they remain efficient
- Reduce the amount of time you use a tool in one go, by doing other jobs in between
- Avoid gripping or forcing a tool or workpiece more than you have to
- Store tools so that they do not have very cold handles when next used
- Encourage good blood circulation by:
 - Keeping warm and dry (when necessary, wear gloves, a hat, waterproofs and use heating pads if available)
 - Giving up or cutting down on smoking because smoking reduces blood flow
 - Massaging and exercising your fingers during work breaks

What else can I do?

It is the employer's responsibility to protect employees against HAVS

- Learn to recognise the early signs and symptoms of HAVS
- Report any symptoms promptly to your employer or the person who does your health checks
- Use any control measures your employer has put in place to reduce the risk of HAVS
- Ask your trade union safety representative or employee representative for advice

