

Manual Handling in the Equine Industry – Have you considered the impact?

By Jane Patching Health and Safety Manager for Equine and Small Businesses



Jane Patching is a qualified Health, Safety and Environment Manager. She is also a keen equestrian for over 25 years and enjoys competing in dressage with her horse. As she has had back injuries and suffers from osteoarthritis, she has first-hand experience of injuries brought on by repetitive strain around the yard. How can you reduce the risk and keep your horse loving children from having strains, injuries, and longer lasting issues?

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Manual handling is “the movement of load by human effort alone”



This can include pushing, pulling, carrying, lifting, lowering, dropping, and throwing.

As equestrians we tend to accept the fact we must lift bales, push wheelbarrows, carry tack, and hay nets, plus a huge variety of other tasks – but have you thought

“How is this affecting me?” or “Is there a better way to approach this?”

Feeling any sort of twinge or pull can often result in us reaching for some painkillers and perhaps resting (ok, we are equestrians.... we don't rest, we just carry on!) but, what do these twinges mean? It is vitally important that we acknowledge them as over time they can develop into something more.



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80% of people will suffer with back pain (Source NHS UK)

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) of Her Majesty's Government statistics from 2020/2021 show that manual handling injuries accounted for a third of all accidents at work – with half of these being back injuries. 80% of people will suffer with back pain in their life (Source NHS UK) –the majority will acknowledge this, but never have it specifically diagnosed. It should not be something we just accept as part of daily life and part of getting older; it is something we must raise our awareness of and improve our way of working to reduce the impact.

There are different types of injury that can affect us, and we need to be aware of these.

- **Cumulative** – these are injuries caused by repetition from carrying out the same task frequently and for large amounts of time.
- **Traumatic** – too much, too quickly – an impact from dropping something on your foot perhaps?
- **Degenerative** – a result of previous injury (in this case my osteoarthritis has most likely fast tracked from the many falls and over handling of loads in the past). Interesting fact; our bodies peak growing at around 25 years old... the body starts to degenerate from age 30 onwards – therefore another great reason to promote awareness and self-care from early on.
- **Psychological** – usually caused by poor immune system, stress, age and other factors.

As a health and safety professional, I have encountered many manual handling issues across a wide range of industries. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to assessing manual handling tasks, which can make it difficult sometimes. Where these tasks are being undertaken, it is important to risk assess what you are doing and consider the physical impacts. Risk assessments can help us to decide what control measures we can use to reduce the risk of serious injury (it is worth noting that if you employ 5 or more people there is a legal requirement to document your risk assessments – including manual handling).



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We can use a process called '**TILE**' (**Task, Individual, Load, Environment**) to help us assess what we are doing and consider changes we can make.

Task – what are we actually doing?

Can manual handling aspects of our job increase the risk of injury? Are we having to twist, stoop, reach, carry out repetitive movements etc.

What manual handling aids could we use eg wheelbarrows, sack barrows, two person handling.

Individual – who is completing the task?

No two people are the same. It is vital we consider an individual's personal capabilities when manual handling. People differ in physical strength, height, and reach. What is it about the person that could make the task less safe? – does the individual suffer with pre-existing injuries? Also, consider new or expectant mothers, an individual's age, young workers (under 18), people with disabilities, temporary workers, and potentially lone workers.

Load – what are we trying to move?

Not everything comes neatly packaged in an easy to lift box. Consider size, shape, weight, and potential instability of a load – bales of hay, sacks of feed and jump poles for example can require different types of handling to ensure they do not increase the risk of injury.

Environment – what is happening around us?

Weather conditions – is it icy, wet, slippery. Are there potential slip/trip/fall hazards? How far do we need to move the load? Do we have to encounter steps, slopes and different surfaces eg flat concrete yards or moving equipment in an arena with an unlevel surface.



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It doesn't take long to step back and consider these points before you step in and start to move items.



As a back injury and osteoarthritis sufferer, I know only too well how prolonged incorrect handling of items can be damaging to the body. In my younger days I worked full time with horses and as a horse owner now, I am very aware of the stresses I have put on my body in the past. I wish 25+ years ago somebody had stopped me and questioned my handling methods when moving heavy and awkward loads. Back pain and other musculoskeletal injuries are not just "something old people have". Often, as in my case, working with horses is something that takes off from a love of riding as a child, back then I did not have my own pony and I would do anything I could to

help at local yards in return for that chance to ride a pony. When I became a working pupil, the focus was always on learning how to look after horses, groom, plait, bandage, muck out, fill hay nets, make feeds, clean tack and a very long list of other tasks – what I developed was a high standard of horse care and an extensive knowledge of their injuries and other ailments and how best to take care of them. A great set of skills to learn – but wait – what is missing here? self-care. Only when I became a health and safety professional did I realise the extent of the damage poor manual handling had taken on my body, yes, I might grab a wheelbarrow to move bags of feed, but that was more down to being in a rush and making less trips carrying stuff – never was it about looking after myself.

iTip® ergonomic safety handles

I am always looking for ways to improve my lifting and carrying tasks, to ensure I do not develop any further injuries. The type of products I look for are ones that are easy to use and that fit into my routine without adding extra time to those precious pre work yard visits at 06:30 each day. I came across iTip® ergonomic handles at a health and safety show in the autumn of 2021 and was immediately drawn to the simplicity and effectiveness of the product (not to mention the wide choice of colours – perfect for complimenting the matchy, matchy set!).

These handles are specially designed rotating handles for fitting to existing wheelbarrow and sack barrow handles. They enable you to move your barrow safely whilst keeping your back and wrist straight, which in turn prevents strain and injury. I have been very fortunate to trial these handles for the last few months and what a difference they have made!



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Manoeuvring my wheelbarrow is much easier and they are especially beneficial when tipping the wheelbarrow onto the muck heap. No longer do I have to reach, stretch and tip forward, I just rotate the handles and the wheelbarrow takes the strain and does the work. I have worked in health and safety for many years now and I can honestly say this product is one of the best manual handling solutions I have come across – I wish they had been around years ago when I worked as a full-time groom – I might not have suffered so much from all the manual handling I had to do.



Another key factor for me is that iTip® handles are a British product, they are 100% produced and designed within the UK and this is another great reason to invest in a set and support our home-grown companies and reduce more unnecessary shipping and environmental impacts. Plus, this product lasts! My wheelbarrow has lived outside through every weather imaginable, and the handles still look as good as new, no damage, no cracks, no deterioration, no fading – a quality product.

Often the words 'health and safety' can be scary and overwhelming due to the misconception that is all about over complication and paperwork – this really isn't the case. It is about making reasonable adjustments to the way we work and finding effective solutions that work for us and our employees.



When considering manual handling adjustments in the workplace, you do not need to make huge changes and buy rafts of new equipment. The iTip® handles are a quick and simple method to make a huge difference to all people who work with or own horses. Even if you do not feel any aches or pains when carrying out manual handling, it does not mean that the repetitive nature of these tasks will not cause you problems in the future – prevention is better than cure!



Take Up The Reins risk assessment for equestrian

For assistance with risk assessing your manual handling tasks or any other health, safety and environmental issues, contact Take Up The Reins for friendly and approachable specialist advice to ensure you remain safe and compliant. Take Up The Reins aren't just for the equine industry – we also assist agricultural businesses, farmers and small businesses. Our key aim is to help you ensure your company is compliant and your employees are safe. Our bespoke service ensures all our visits, reports and documentation are totally relevant to your individual business. Contact us now for a free 30-minute consultation to see just how we can help.

iTip Ergonomic Safety Handles

iTip® Handles replace existing handles on manual handling equipment such as wheelbarrows and wheelchairs. They are ergonomically designed to rotate. Therefore, as you walk, lift, and manoeuvre your wheelbarrow it keeps your back and wrist straight, reducing strain, injury, and longer-term musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). Using a heavy-laden wheelbarrow of manure or hay is a challenge. Add to this uneven surfaces and dangerous heap inclines, inclement weather and the risks are increased. With iTip Handles, challenging heaps are smoothed out when attacking the incline. Most importantly, tipping your wheelbarrow is easier as it is possible to remain in control, holding rather than letting go, to tip out the manure.



Sustainability

A key parameter for innovation is to make the product as sustainable as possible. To this end iTip Safety Handles break down in compostable conditions. They are manufactured in Slough, the UK, to reduce their carbon footprint. The nature of manual handling also reduces the need for carbon producing powered equipment to move loads.

Availability

iTip Safety Handles are currently available from www.SafetyHandles.co.uk. They are supplied individually and in bulk trade packs of various multiples. Please contact us on 0333 800 5000 for an account. The products are provided in Available at a very reasonable price for added safety, they come in a selection of colours to match your livery. Individual sets of iTip Handles are available at £25 (+VAT). For exports, please call Paul on 0333 800 5000.

Summary

iTip Safety Handles are an inexpensive control measure designed to improve safety and comfort.

To book a safety assessment or gain advice contact Jane Patching on 07513 008128 jptakeupthereins@gmail.com or visit www.TakeUpTheReins.com.

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