

Don't ignore symptoms!

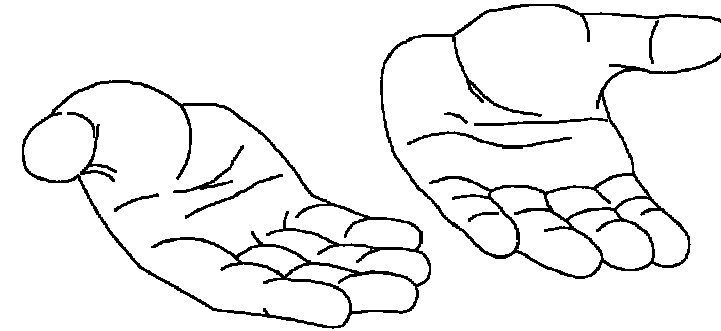
If you think vibration could be affecting your fingers or hands, see your own doctor or discuss it at your next medical.

What can your employer do?

Your employer should reduce the risk wherever this is reasonably practicable by, for example:

- seeing if the job can be done without using high-vibration tools;
- making sure the new tools have vibration control built in;
- reducing the vibration levels of the tools you use;
- training you in the correct use of tools and in recognising early symptoms of injury;
- arranging advice and routine health checks for you if you use high-vibration tools;
- enabling you to keep warm in the cold (for example by providing heating or suitable clothing and gloves).

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Hand-Arm Vibration

Advice on vibration white finger
for employees.

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What is vibration white finger?

Vibration white finger (VWF) is the most common symptom of hand-arm vibration syndrome (HAVS). VWF is also known as 'dead hand' or 'dead finger' and could affect those of you who regularly use high-vibration equipment.

It can:

- damage blood vessels, reducing blood supply;
- damage nerves in the fingers, causing a permanent loss of feeling;
- cause damage to bones and muscles.

You may:

- lose flexibility and strength of grip;
- find it more difficult to work with hand-held tools;
- find it difficult to enjoy hobbies such as swimming, gardening or angling where your fingers can get cold.

What are the signs?

The symptoms of VWF are usually set off by cold. Early on they are mild. The first sign is often an occasional attack when the fingertips become white. If you continue to work with vibrating tools, the affected area can get larger. During an attack there may also be numbness or 'pins and needles', and an attack may end with the whiteness changing to a deep red flush which is often very painful.

What causes the problem?

Many common tools and processes produce high levels of vibration, such as road drills, pedestal grinders, power hammers, chainsaws, and rivetting and chipping hammers.

The risk depends on a number of things:

The amount of vibration is important, along with how long you use the tools, the way you use working conditions, such as cold it is. A simple rule is to regard any vibrating tool as suspect if it causes tingling or numbness in your fingers after about 5 to 10 minutes of continuous use.

What can you do to reduce the risk?

It is your employer's job to reduce the risk of you getting VWF where this can reasonably be done, especially if you have to carry on using high-vibration tools. But you too can play a part:

- tell your supervisor about any tools or processes which produce high levels of vibration, so that the risk can be properly assessed;
- keep up blood flow while working:
 - Keepwarm at work, especially your hands. Wear warm gloves and extra clothing if you work in the cold;
 - don't smoke, or at least cut down just before and while you are at work. Smoking affects blood flow;
 - exercise your hands and fingers to improve blood flow;
- use the right tool for the job. Making do with the wrong tools can mean more vibration, or that you have to grip the tools more tightly;
- do not use any more force than necessary when operating tools safely and effectively;
- try to avoid long periods of using equipment without a break - short bursts are better;
- keep tools in good working order - if they are in bad condition ask your supervisor to get them repaired;
- take an active part in your employer's health and safety training – talk to your health and safety representative;
- make sure that you attend routine health checks when requested to do so.

