

Worried about Hand arm Vibration(HAV)

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) is a widespread recognised industrial disease affecting tens of thousands of workers. It is a disorder, which affects the blood vessels, nerves, muscles, and joints, of the hand wrist and arm normally caused by excessive, long-term exposure to working with tools that vibrate, or holding materials that are shaking.

Introduction

HAVS is caused by repeated and frequent use of hand held vibrating tools. For example, power drills, chainsaws, pneumatic drills, etc. It may also be caused by holding or working with machinery that vibrates. It is not clear how vibration causes the condition. It is probably due to slight but repeated injury to the small nerves and blood vessels in the fingers. Over time these may gradually lose some of their function and cause symptoms. It has been estimated that up to 1 in 10 people who work regularly with vibrating tools may develop HAVS .

Am I at risk?

You are at risk if you regularly use hand-held or hand guided power tools and machines such as:

- Concrete breakers, concrete pokers;
- Sanders, grinders, disc cutters;
- Hammer drills;
- Chipping hammers;
- Chainsaws, brush cutters, hedge trimmers,
- Powered mowers;
- Scabblers or needle guns.

You are particularly at risk if you regularly operate:

- Hammer action tools for more than about 15 minutes per day; or
- Some rotary and other action tools for more than about one hour per day.

What are the early signs and symptoms to look out for?

- Tingling and numbness in the fingers (which can cause sleep disturbance).
- Not being able to feel things with your fingers.
- Loss of strength in your hands (you may be less able to pick up or hold heavy objects).
- In the cold and wet, the tips of your fingers going white then red and being painful on recovery (vibration white finger).

. What is being done about it?

- In recent years most, probably all, manufacturers who sell equipment into EU markets have been working to lessen the vibrations produced by their products.
- More recently, some machines have been completely re-designed in order to reduce vibrations to an acceptable level.

Tools

What kinds of tools and equipment can cause ill health from vibration? There are hundreds of different types of hand-held power tools and equipment, which can cause ill health from vibration. Some of the more common ones are:

- Concrete breakers/road breakers;
- Cut-off saws (for stone etc);
- Hammer drills;
- Hand-held grinders;
- Impact wrenches;
- Jigsaws;
- Needle scalers;
- Pedestal grinders;
- Polishers;
- Power hammers and chisels;
- Powered lawn mowers;
- Powered sanders;
- Scabblers;
- Strimmers/brush cutters.

How do I protect myself?

Ask yourself 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);
 - Massaging and exercising your fingers during work breaks.

What else can I do?

- Learn to recognise the early signs and symptoms of HAVS.
- Seek medical advice