

# Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS)

The purpose of this article is to educate our staff and crew about the Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome and what we can do to protect ourselves.

You could be risking damage to nerves, blood vessels and joints of the hand, wrist and arm if you work regularly with hand-held or hand-guided power tools for more than a few hours each day.



Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS) caused by exposure to vibration at work is preventable, but once the damage is done it is permanent.

## Am I at risk?

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

- Sander, grinders, disc cutters
- Hammer drills
- Chipping hammers
- Chainsaws, brush cutters
- Scabblers or needle guns

You are also at risk if you hold workpieces, which vibrate while being processed by powered machinery such as pedestal grinders.

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).



If you continue to use high-vibration tools these symptoms will probably get worse, for example:

- The numbness in your hands could become permanent and you won't be able to feel things at all.
- You will have difficulty picking up small objects such as screws or nails.
- The vibration white finger could happen more frequently and affect more of your fingers.

## How do I protect myself?

- 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; and
  - Massaging and exercising your fingers during work breaks.