

## Manual handling tips for telecommuters

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Telecommuting –working from home or from satellite offices or client sites – is becoming more prevalent due to advances in IT and employer support. With this comes a new set of manual handling hazards, given employees are frequently lifting and carrying items from vehicles, such as laptops, references, and files. There is also the need to ensure the home or satellite office is ergonomically set up to minimise the occurrence of musculoskeletal strain.

### Tip 1 Station wagons are ideal

Carrying items to and from the car is one of the most obvious manual handling hazards for telecommuters. Getting the items out of the car safely is the first step. A station wagon would be the ideal choice for employees frequently loading / unloading from the vehicle. This set up allows the person to position themselves close to the load with their back straight and lift / lower the items using their legs.

### Tip 2 Golfer's Lift

Not everyone has access to a station wagon. Accessing items from a standard sedan boot does have its hazards. The car design is such that should a person position themselves close enough to the load to lift it, they are unable to utilise correct manual handling principles such as bending their hips and knees to power the lift as their knees often abuts the car. This places the person in a hazardous situation whereby they are lifting an item with their back bent forward. An alternative lift called a "Golfer's Lift" can be utilised. The Golfer's Lift is ideal for lifting light weight items from the boot of the car or from a shopping trolley. The person's back kept straight and the lifting / lowering is conducted by using the back leg as a counter lever.



**Tip 3 Passenger seat, not storage area**

Do avoid placing items such as laptop cases and files in the front passenger seat. It is tempting to reach over whilst sitting in the driver's seat to pull the item across before getting out of the vehicle. This involves simultaneous lumbar flexion, rotation and lifting forces (i.e. lifting and twisting) which can potentially cause a back injury.



**Tip 4 Travel aids**

If you find yourself in situations where you are required to carry items over a distance from your car, it is worthwhile investing in a light weight collapsible trolley such as the "Clax Cart" which can be easily folded for storage in your boot. An alternative is to consider using a 'pull along' luggage case. These can often be purchased with a laptop case attachment clip. If you are only carrying your laptop, then you may want to consider a laptop backpack. This distributes the weight evenly across both shoulders rather than the standard laptop case which is slung over one shoulder.

**Tip 5 Hazards at home**

For telecommuters based in your home and satellite office, you will need to ensure your ergonomic set up is appropriate. This includes considering what other hazards are specific to your work space. Many organisations have home office assessment checklists to cover basic hazard identification and ergonomic set up. ResolutionsRTK can also assist with home and satellite office ergonomic assessments, and assist employers to develop or review their 'work from home' policies.

**Tip 6 Portable supports**

For employees who set up 'nomadic workstations' at different client sites, it is worthwhile investing in a laptop stand, separate keyboard and mouse. This will ensure the laptop screen is raised at an appropriate height to minimise neck and upper limb strain. When selecting a laptop stand, consider the weight of the unit and how easily it can fold into your laptop case. Similarly, when selecting portable printers and other IT equipment, one of the considerations should be how heavy the unit is and the design of its carry case.

**Tip 7 Lumbar jacks**

For some of us, being 'on the road' comprises much of our work day, from visiting clients to travelling between offices. Whilst most vehicles have good lumbar support in the driver's seat and suspension, there may be situations where a person would benefit from a back rest insert or a wedge cushion for extra lumbar and lateral support, in order to minimise jarring forces. ResolutionsRTK can assist in arranging a driver's seat assessment by a qualified occupational therapist to identify what the needs are and to make any necessary recommendations.

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