

5 musculoskeletal myths busted

A guide for employees

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) affected nearly half a million workers in 2019 according to HSE*.

MSDs are conditions affecting the joints, nerves, tendons and muscles. They're very common in the workplace and the average person suffering from MSDs takes over 14 days off work sick, according to HSE*. But misinformation can contribute to a delay in full recovery.

Here are five of the biggest MSD myths and what you can do to improve your outcome.



Myth 1: I need a new desk or special equipment

Most people spend their time at work sitting down, so the finger is often pointed at desks as the culprit of musculoskeletal pain. While poor workstation ergonomics – like an unsupportive chair or sitting at an angle to your monitor – can contribute to an MSD, desks often unfairly take all the blame for painful conditions. It's important to be aware of the wider picture.

Sitting while we take breaks and relax in the evening all play their part in damaging musculoskeletal health. Reducing our sedentary behaviour can have a number of health benefits, including reducing pain. Regular exercise is a key way to prevent MSDs from occurring, so get up from your desk regularly, take a walk when you can and do what you can to fit exercise into your lifestyle.

Sleep quality can also have an effect on MSDs. A lack of good quality sleep increases cortisol levels which can exacerbate the pain people feel. Getting at least eight hours of good quality sleep per night can reduce aches and pains and can also improve concentration, focus, memory and overall performance.



Myth 2: Exercise will make it worse

People with MSDs often avoid exercise and strenuous activity in fear of aggravating their condition.

But exercise is one of the best ways to prevent and recover from an MSD, as it can strengthen muscles and joints, improving flexibility and reducing the body's sensitivity to pain. It also helps weight management, which can lessen the risk of developing an MSD in the first place.

It's important to carry out the right exercise plan for your individual needs, so you should **consult a physiotherapist** before starting a new regime if you suffer from an MSD.



Myth 3: The pain is all in your head

All pain is real and based upon physiological responses. However, the pain felt isn't always related to the level of damage to tissues of the body, which is where things get complicated. For example, paper cuts cause sharp pain, but virtually no damage.

Pain can be quite complex and involves multiple systems of the body. It is also impacted by a number of factors including overall health and fitness, levels of stress and anxiety, quality of sleep, as well as the nature of the injury.

For example, if you have a sore neck and you are suffering from stress at work, the experience of pain can be worse because the hormones and chemicals in your body associated with stress can also increase pain.



Myth 4: Smoking only affects your lungs

Not many people know that smoking has been linked to loss of muscle mass, increased muscle pain and tendon degeneration.

Weaker muscles and reduced physical fitness leaves you much more susceptible to musculoskeletal injury and make it harder to recover should an injury happen. Quit now and you'll soon notice the benefits beyond just breathing easier.



Myth 5: Physiotherapy won't help

There are many misconceptions about physiotherapy but it's so much more than just a massage and it can help anyone in pain, not just professional sports people.

Physiotherapists are experts in MSDs and are able to get to the root cause of the problem. They work with individual patients to improve their pain and get them back to their normal activities.

They do this by looking holistically at your symptoms and devising rehabilitation plans which will ensure improvements are made in both the short and long term. Treatments range from joint mobilisation and manipulation to soft tissue techniques and your plan may include adapting lifestyle factors such as your diet, sleep patterns and emotional wellbeing to help you avoid, manage and recover quickly from an MSD.

Check with your employer to see if you have access to physiotherapy as a workplace benefit or click [here](#) to find out more about our online physiotherapy service.



For more information on our physiotherapy services speak to your Nuffield Health Client Director or visit our website nuffieldhealth.com/workplace-wellbeing for articles on how to stay healthy during lockdown.