NHSNSS Healthy WorkingLives

Staff guide to

NHS National Services Scotland

Manual Handling at Work

Contents

Introduction

We all pick up and move objects all the time at work and at home, any of these actions may present a hazard. The risk that the action will cause an injury of some kind to a person undertaking the operation or, by causing the object to fall or move, may also harm someone else.

The extent to which there is risk associated with any form of manual handling will be the subject of a risk assessment, which we will look at later. It is worth noting that risk does not just arise in relation to the lifting and movement of heavy loads. These do present a significant risk, but the way in which apparently light and easy objects are handled can also cause harm and injury.

There are actually four main causes of harm in manual handling operations:

1) Failing to use a proper technique for lifting and/or moving the object or load
2) Moving loads which are too heavy
3) Failing to grip the object / load in a safe manner
4) Not wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

Harm from any of these actions may cause immediate injury or longer term, chronic mobility problems.

For more information on the NSS requirements with regard to Manual Handling and your Health and Safety see the Healthy Working Lives geNSS site.


HANDLE
WITH CARE
BT

More than a third of all reportable injuries of over 3 days involve manual handling. Around 10% of major injuries are linked to manual handling. It has a major impact on all workplaces and costs the economy hundreds of millions of pounds each year.
Information taken from 'Getting to Grips with Manual Handling - A Short Guide' (indg143) published by HSE.

The most recent survey of self-reported work-related illness estimated that over one million people in Great Britain suffered from musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) caused or made worse by their current or past work.

In the UK it is estimated 12.3 million working days were lost annually due to these work related MSDs. On average each sufferer took about 20 days off during that particular 12 month period.

The most common type of incident/accident reported in NSS from April 2008 to March 2009 was manual handling related.

Back Injuries

These are caused by twisting, lifting or pushing loads where the stress is borne on the spine, usually towards the base.

Excessive torsional or crushing movement on the spine can lead to displacement of the intervertebral discs – the fluid-filled cushions of grisle between the vertebrae (the bone structural units of your spine).

The most serious injuries are slipped or crushed discs, but this can also cause sciatica (pain in the sciatic nerve which runs down the back and the legs). More generalised back problems such as lumbago can also be very debilitating.

Many back problems are an acute response to, lifting a particularly heavy load. They can also become chronic problems, having built up over time. Early investigation of backache is therefore recommended as it may develop into a more serious problem.

Muscular Problems

When a muscle is stretched beyond its normal limit it is strained. When subjected to sudden or excessive force it may be strained. Either of these two causes may tear or rupture the casing of the muscle, which is a serious injury. The effect is to weaken joints and restrict movement, making it painful.
Muscular problems may be caused by stretching, lifting heavy loads or slips, strips and falls. In most cases they are acute injuries, but strains can build up over time. Some generalised lower back problems are the result of pelvic or sacroiliac strains.

Hernias

A hernia is a rupture in the musculature of the body cavity wall, usually in the lower abdomen, which allows the protrusion of part of the intestine. Hernias can be caused by excessive strain on those muscles during lifting.

Cuts, Abrasions and Bruising

These will be caused by contact with the surfaces of the objects or loads being handled. The size and weight of the object is immaterial in respect of cuts and abrasions – paper is well known for producing painful cuts on the fingers.

Bone Injuries

Fractures and cracks are usually impact injuries caused by crushing part of the body, usually fingers, under a load or dropping objects on feet. They may also be caused by slips, trips and falls.

Work Related Upper Limb Disorders (WRULDs)

The term ‘work related upper limb disorders’ has replaced the term ‘repetitive strain injury’ to refer to ill-health conditions which affect the upper limbs. Upper limb disorders affect the soft connecting tissues, muscles and nerves of the hand, wrist, arm and shoulder. Severity may vary from occasional aches, pains and discomfort of the affected part through to well-defined and specific disease or injury. Loss of function may result in reduced work capacity.

WRULDs arise from ordinary movements, such as repetitive gripping, twisting, reaching or moving. The stress involved in the individual movements themselves may be very little, but the hazard is created by prolonged repetition, often in a forceflul and awkward manner, without sufficient rest or recovery time. The load need not be heavy – it is the awkward or repetitive movement (such as twisting to turn or control a lever) which causes the damage. Consequently a range of occupations may be affected including production line workers, packers, painters and machine operators.

The effects are:

- General fatigue and loss of concentration or co-ordination
- Inflammation of the tendon, muscle tendon junction or tendon sheath
- Inflammation of the tissue of the hand (or elbow, or even knee) caused by constant bruising or friction
- Compression of the peripheral nerves serving the upper limb (Carpal Tunnel Syndrome)
- Temporary fatigue, stiffness or soreness of the muscles.

The key factors associated with the increased risk of WRULD include excess force exerted to overcome resistance in a work operation due to poor design, high repetitive motions with short cycle times giving little time for recovery, and awkward postures causing significant stress to joist of the upper limbs and surrounding soft tissues.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations were first introduced in 1992 and amended in 2002. These regulations are designed to ensure that employees are not put at risk of injury from the manual handling of loads at work. It places a duty on all employers to undertake risk assessments to determine any health and safety risks to employees in relation to manual handling activities and places a duty on employees to take responsibility for their own health, safety and wellbeing when carrying out any activities.

The key Employers Duties from the Manual Handling regulations are:

- Avoid so far as is reasonably practicable, the need for hazardous manual handling operations
- Assess the risk of injury from any hazardous manual handling operations that can't be avoided
- Reduce so far as is reasonably practicable, the risk of injury from any hazardous manual handling activity

What are our responsibilities as an employee?

Employees while at work are required to read and fully understand the risk assessments, and :

- Follow appropriate systems of work laid down for their safety.
- Make proper use of equipment provided for their safety.
- Co-operate with their employer on health and safety matters.
- Inform the employer if they identify any hazardous manual handling activities.
- Take care to ensure that their activities do not put others at risk.

Before you carry out the manual handling task check:

- Do you have to move it at all?, or can the work activity be safely undertaken in situ ?
- Can you take the treatment to the patient?
- Can raw materials be piped in to their point of use?


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Consider automation, particularly for new processes and think about:

- mechanisation and the use of handling aids, eg, pallet truck, sack truck, fork lift truck, dollies or cages

Be aware of new hazards that may be introduced from using automation or mechanisation

- Automated plant still needs to be cleaned and maintained etc ;
- Lift trucks must be suited to the work and have properly trained operators

As an employee you are working with the process and procedures. If you feel that you have a way in which the task can be completed and the manual handling activities reduced please discuss this with your manager.

Risk Assessment - Assessing and Reducing the Risk of Injury

When should a manual handling risk assessment be undertaken?

Any manual handling task that has the potential to cause harm should be risk assessed. This can be simply a few minutes spent by you observing the task to identify ways to make the activity easier and less risky, ie less physically demanding. Higher risk manual handling activities require a more formal and full assessment to be undertaken.

Who should make the assessment?

It is the responsibility of the employer to see that the assessment is undertaken; the process itself should be carried out by someone involved with the activity, and a trained manual handling risk assessor. The findings from this assessment should be recorded.

It is sometimes acceptable to do a generic assessment one that is common to several employees or to more than one site or type of work.

However this should only be accepted where there are no individual or local factors which need to be considered, for example differences in stature, competence etc;

You should review any risk assessment if individual employees report adverse symptoms, become ill, injured, are pregnant, disabled, young persons or returning following a long period of sickness, as they may become more vulnerable to risk. Also after any accident or incident has occured.

Remember, individual risk assessments for disabled employees may need to be undertaken, in compliance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

How should I use my assessment?

Don't just forget about it or file it away. This should be maintained as a live document. The purpose of the assessment is to pin point the worst features of the work, they are the ones you need to try and improve first. It is also important to remember to review and update the assessment following any significant change to the workplace, equipment or staff.

Who needs to access the risk assessment?

All employees likely to be involved in that particular task and anyone who may be affected by the activities should be made aware of the risks identified in the risk assessment.

The important thing with all risk assessments is to identify all the significant risks of injury, point the way to practical improvements, and ensure the findings are communicated to anyone who may be affected by the work to be undertaken.

Carrying out a risk assessment

When undertaking a manual handling assessment always apply the '**TILEE'** principle

TASK
INDIVIDUAL
LOAD
ENVIRONMENT
EQUIPMENT

How Do I Know if there Is a Risk of Injury?

It's a matter of judgement in each case, but there are certain things to look out for, such as people puffing and sweating, excessive fatigue, bad posture, cramped work areas, awkward or heavy loads or a history of back trouble. Employees can often highlight which activities are unpopular, difficult or hard work.
It is difficult to be precise - so many factors vary between jobs, workplaces and people. But the general risk assessment guidelines should help to identify when a more detailed risk assessment is necessary.

The Task

Manual handling may involve lifting and lowering loads from the floor at any height, reaching up to get a load, pulling or pushing a load, twisting it around, etc. Such operations may be done only occasionally or may be repetitive, such as twisting to agitate blood samples at a donor session.

All tasks involving any form of manual handling operations should be analysed to see if it involves:

- Holding loads away from the body?
- Twisting, stooping or reaching upwards?
- Large vertical movement?
- Long carrying distances?
- Strenuous pushing or pulling?
- Repetitive handling?
- Insufficient rest or recovery time?
- A work rate imposed by a process?

Ways of reducing the risk of injury - can I make the task safer?

Where it is not possible to incorporate mechanical aids, considerations should be given to:

- The re-design of the task itself.
- The sequence of the tasks.
- Use a lifting aid.
- Improve workplace layout to improve efficiency.
- Reduce the amount of twisting and stooping.
- Avoid lifting from floor level or above shoulder height, especially heavy loads.
- Reduce carrying distances.
- Avoid repetitive handling.
- Use more people to carry out the task.
- Vary the work to allow one set of muscles to rest while another is used.
- Push rather than pull.

The Individual

There are three main aspects to a consideration of an individual's ability to carry out manual handling tasks job safely.

Do you require unusual capability?

This considers the demands made by the task and the loads involved – does it require unusual strength or people of a particular height?

- Will it endanger me if I have a health problem or learning/ physical disability or I am a pregnant women or a young employee?

Your general health and fitness is a significant factor in your ability to undertake manual handling operations. Those who are overweight, underweight, suffering from arthritis or other conditions causing painful backs or joints, have a chest or heart complaints, or suffering from a rupture or prolapse may be unsuited to some types of manual handling. We should not be expected to undertake any tasks which would make our condition worse or which, because of the conditions, may make us more susceptible to injury.

Do I require special information or training?

All employees should be provided with sufficient information about the task they are required to do. The risk assessment should consider whether any particular information or specific, specialised training is required.

Individual capacity - Ways of reducing the risk of injury

Part of the safe system of work for manual handling should be systems to ensure that individuals are capable at all times of carrying out any manual handling tasks in a competent manner.
Managers are required to:

- Pay particular attention to people who have physical weaknesses.
- Give careful consideration to pregnant workers within assessments.
- Ensure adequate information, instruction, training and supervision is provided to staff for the manual handling activities they undertake.

The Load

A load is defined as any movable object, including another person.
A load constitutes a potential hazard because of its weight, size, shape, and resistance to movement, rigidity or lack of it, position of the centre of gravity, presence or absence of handles or surface texture.
Check when carrying out the assessment if it is:

- Heavy, bulky or unwieldy?
- Difficult to grasp?
- Unstable or likely to move unpredictably (e.g. an animal)
- Harmful, eg sharp or hot?
- Awkwardly stacked?
- Too large for the handler to see over?

Ways of reducing the risk of injury - can you make the Load safer?

Attention should be given to reducing the weight of loads and making them easier to handle safely. When carrying out an assessment we should check:

- The weight and size – consideration should be given to breaking up loads so that individual items are lighter and/or smaller. However this may mean that more handling tasks are required.
- Making the load easier to grasp – where it is not possible to make the load smaller, hand grips or handles may be required Making the load more stable and rigid – use rigid containers and ensure that the weight is well distributed
- Markings – it is helpful to those carrying out the tasks to be aware of the approximate weight and centre of gravity.
- External Suppliers - have you asked them to help by providing the load in easier to handle packaging eg provide handles or gripping points or in smaller packages.

The Environment

The environment refers to the general and specific conditions in the immediate surroundings whenever the manual handling tasks occur.

These should include:

- Constraints on posture, does the area allow free movement?
- Uneven or slippery floor surfaces, broken tiles, changes in flooring.
- Proposed routes clear of obstructions.
- Variations in floor levels, ladders, shelving heights.
- Excessively hot/cold or humid conditions.
- Wind conditions.
- Poor lighting conditions or lighting variations e.g. – strong sunlight to inside a building.
- Any restrictions on movement due to clothes or personal protective equipment (PPE).

Ways of reducing the risk of injury - Work Environment

The conditions within which people carry out manual handling tasks can often be made more suitable. Areas that should be reviewed and taken into consideration are:

- Workstation design – there should be adequate space available for all movements involved, including space for variations in movement and individual flexibility in the way in which the operation is carried out.
- Floor Conditions – all floors should be maintained and free of obstructions, bumps, holes and any materials which may cause employees to slip, fall or otherwise lose their footing when completing tasks. Ensure that debris is picked up and cleared away and any spillages cleaned quickly.
- Prevent extremes of temperature – hot and cold, maintain a comfortable temperature to reduce fatigue.
- Lighting – ensure that there is adequate lighting and employees are able to see all parts of the working area, including the floor
- Wear appropriate clothing and PPE for the task, PPE may include gloves, aprons, protective footwear.

Good Lifting/Moving Practice

Having a strong healthy back is central to our physical wellbeing and is often taken for granted. Yet almost a third of adults suffer from back problems each year.
This area of the booklet has been produced to help you improve or maintain your back's health by providing helpful advice in how to:

- Prevent back pain and back injury;
- Demonstrate safer ways to lift and carry;
- Make simple postural and lifestyle changes;
- Take exercise to protect your back;
- Relax and take care of your back.

Posture Matters

Poor posture will over time stress the back and can lead to chronic pain.

Here are some practical tips to help you to improve your posture along with some simple exercises to keep your back in action.

Good working postures when manual handling:
- Ensure working heights are appropriate.
- Ensure items are within reach distance.
- Provide suitable (and adjustable) seating.
- Reposition items that workers are required to look at.
- Relocate equipment or items.
- Remember the greater deviation from a neutral position, the greater the risk.
- Remember prevention is always better than cure.

Stand Tall

Good posture is about standing tall using minimal effort while remaining relaxed.
Imagine a thread running through the centre of your body from the top of your head to the base of your feet and that you are being lifted up by this thread.

- Try to avoid rounding your back and slouching or hunching your shoulders and tensing your neck when stressed.
  Try to avoid standing still or placing the body in one particular position for lengthy periods of time – move around or even have a quick stretch and roll of the shoulders to prevent muscles tiring and the spine sagging.

Walk Tall

Maintaining a good posture when standing will ensure that you walk properly too. Walk tall and stay relaxed with your head up and shoulders back. Let your arms swing freely. If you are walking any distance, try to choose shoes with a moderate heel and support at the instep. Try to avoid high heels which force the pelvis to tilt forward, causing the lower back to arch excessively.

Good Lifting / Moving Practice

Before you move any object, examine it first. Check its weight and look for sharp edges. Ensure it is stable and its weight is equally distributed.

Plan Your Job

Review the safe system of work and plan your route so that it's free from trip or slip hazards. Check if there are areas where you can put your load down on the way if required.

Get a Good Grip

Decide how you will hold the object before you pick it up. Get a good secure grip. If the object is sharp, hot, cold or an irregular size you will require to wear gloves.
If the object is big or heavy - use mechanical aids or ask someone for some help.

Are you wearing the right equipment?

NSS provide a variety of different types of equipment, anti-slip safety shoes, safety goggles, protective gloves or any other personal protective equipment that has been identified to carry out the task.

Rest or rotate tasks. Try to avoid frequent lifting, lowering and moving as this is demanding work and can result in cumulative stress.

Talk to your line manager if you have any problems or any suggestions with your manual handling activities.

The Lift

Good technique is essential and includes the following factors:

- Bend your knees.
- Keep your spine as straight as possible.
- Avoid twisting, over reaching and jerking – move your feet.
- Establish good balance.
- Keep the load as close to your body as possible.
- Use your body weight to lift the load.
- If the load is too heavy, get help form others or use a mechanical aid.

Team Lifts

- Work with someone of similar build and height, if possible.
- Choose one person to call the signals.
- Lift from the hips at the same time, then raise the load to the desired level.
- Move smoothly and in unison.


One Arm Lifts

These are not a good idea, if they cannot be avoided:

- Brace your body with the opposite arm, if possible.
- Reach for the load - bend your knees and waist, and keep your back straight.
- Grasp the load firmly (use a handle, if possible).
- Lift with your legs, using the free arm for balance.
- Keep your shoulders level - switch hands regularly.
- Divide the load if possible.



Overhead Lifts

Lifting to a high place

- Lighten the load if possible.
- Use a mechanical aid or get help if the load is awkward or heavy.

Lowering from a high place

- Test the load's weight by pushing up on it. Check to see if the load will shift when you lift it.
- Check to make sure there isn't anything on top of the load that could fall off when you lift it.
- Stand as close to the load as possible.
- Grasp the object firmly, sliding it down your body.
- Use a mechanical aid or get help if necessary.



Awkward Lifts

- Stand over one corner of the load, with your feet comfortably apart.
- Grasp the bottom inside and top outside corners.
- Bend your knees and lift, keeping the same grip.
- Seek advice if you have any doubts.



Pushing and Pulling

- Stay close to the object.
- Get a good grip on it.
- Keep your back straight, stomach in, knees bent, elbows in.
- Lean in the direction you're pushing or pulling.
- Watch out for obstructions.

Aids such as barrows and trolleys should have handle heights that are between the shoulder and waist. Devices should be well maintained with wheels that run smoothly. When purchasing new trolleys etc, ensure they are good quality with large diameter wheels made of suitable material and with castors, bearings etc which will last with minimum maintenance. Consultation with your employees and safety representatives will help, as they know what works and what doesn't.


BLOOD
TRANSFUSION
SERVICE


FIRE EXIT
Reception

Manual Handling Aids and Equipment

We have previously noted that, wherever possible, mechanical aids should be used to lift and carry loads, this would reduce the risk of injury from manual handling tasks.

NSS have two types of mechanical equipment:

- Manually propelled or powered devices – such as trolleys, cages, sack trucks and pallet trucks – these are pushed or pulled manually.

- Mechanically powered devices – such as fork lift truck, mechanical hoists and cranes and conveyor belts. This is where the power to lift and/or move the load is provided by a motor or other mechanical means, possibly also using manual power.

Introducing these aids does not eliminate risk from the tasks, it changes the types of risks. The use of this equipment presents many different hazards and is another cause of accidents in the workplace.

When using manual handling aids and equipment there is a requirement to ensure a safe system of work is implemented and the questions below should be reviewed:

- Is the device the correct type for the task?
- Is it well maintained? Is there a planned preventative maintance programme?
- Are the wheels on the device suited to the floor surface?
- Do the wheels run freely? – are they suitable for the flooring type to ensure that the equipment moves easily?
- Are the handles and grips in good order and comfortable? Are they suitable?
- Are there any brakes? If so, do they work?
- Have all employees received the suitable training and information on how to use the equipment?

For more information on specific manual handling aids within your departments – please refer to the safe systems of work, risk assessments and training materials available.

Everyday Tasks at home

Sitting Pretty

Most of us spend a lot of time sitting down and it's easy to slouch,so it is important to make sure that our backs are properly supported when seated.

Always make sure that your hips are pushed against the back of the chair and that the chair gives your lower back adequate support.

Try to sit straight with your feet flat on the floor, use a foot stool if necessary; avoid slouching or crossing your legs.

When lounging in an easy chair try to avoid sitting in a slumped or twisted position – however comfortable it may seem, this can lead to back stiffness and pain! Try putting cushions in the small of your back to provide some support.

When you are sitting for any length of time, get up and move about regularly – this will help to keep your muscle tone and joints and circulation healthy.
The best way to sit down is to do it without bending your back. Stand in front of the chair with one foot behind the other, almost under the chair. Bend your knees, and at the same time place your hands on the arms or seat of the chair. Then lower yourself gently into the seat.

Lying Down

When lying down the spine is relieved of weight bearing pressure and your muscles are relaxed. However, it is essential that what you lie on provides adequate support and your body is placed in a comfortable position.

What you lie on is vital to the long-term health of your back – if you regularly wake up with back pain, which recedes, once you are up and about, then this may be due to the type and/or condition of your bed.

If you like to lie on your side, the most comfortable position, is with the back straight but relaxed and the knees drawn up and bent at right angles to the body.

If you like to lie on your back, make sure you lie on a supportive surface. Stretch your legs out and hold your arms loosely across your body at your sides. For maximum relaxation, you may feel more comfortable if you raise your feet slightly with a pillow.

Avoid getting out of bed with sudden jerky movements – many back strains occur in the first 15 minutes of getting out of bed – try rolling onto your side, move one leg over the side of the bed, followed by the other leg, then push your body upright with your arms.

Everyday Activities

Daily activities, both inside and outside the home, are full of potential pitfalls for our backs. Housework, lifting and carrying babies and children, driving, shopping and gardening all involve bending and twisting the spine and increasing the weight burden on our backs. It is

important to be aware of the potential risks involved in these activities and learn the safe way to do them.

Lifting and Carrying

Lifting and carrying items incorrectly are a common cause of back pain and back injury. You should only lift items when it is really necessary and if you do have to lift something, the golden rule is to keep it as close to your body as possible. Remember to bend your knees not your back. Kneel on one knee with the other foot flat on the ground before lifting anything off the floor.
Keep your feet wide apart to help you to feel stable. In this way, you are using your strong leg muscles and not straining your back.

Carry the load close to your body (so that its centre of gravity is close to yours) and keep your elbows tucked in.

Take as much care when putting things down as you did when picking them up.

Housework

Most household tasks can strain the back. Pushing a vacuum cleaner, moving furniture, ironing, cleaning the bath and sweeping the kitchen floor are all activities that involve twisting and bending the spine.

Don’t bend over when cleaning the bath, dusting the skirting boards or reaching low shelves - squat or kneel instead.

Make sure items such as vacuum cleaners, brooms and ironing boards are the right height for you, so that you can use them comfortably without having to bend over them.

Vacuuming involves bending repeatedly, so vacuum the house in short sessions rather than all at once, keeping the vacuum close to your body, and using short sweeping movements backwards and forwards.

Where any household activity involves bending repeatedly, try not to do too much at once and stop regularly to stretch.

Carrying Children

Lifting and moving small children around can be a major source of backache.

Choose a cot with a drop-down side, so that you do not strain your back by bending over the side of the cot and picking up the baby at arms length.

There are back friendly ways of carrying your baby by using a baby carrier. Strap small babies to your front so that the weight is supported by your abdomen and chest. When the baby gets bigger use a baby carrier strapped to your back.

If picking up a child, put one foot in front of the other, bend at your knees and encourage your child to walk up your front leg.

Avoid carrying your child on one hip - carry him or her on the front of your body with their legs around your hips.

Driving

Driving can be stressful for our backs and most car seats now have a wide range of adjustments, but like any piece of equipment it needs to be correctly set up to provide effective protection and comfort.

If you are too far away from the steering wheel you'll end up slouching and those outstretched arms will add to the strain on you back, so adjust the car seat to give your back maximum support and allow you to reach the steering wheel and pedals comfortably.

Make sure your head rest is level with and lies close to the back of your head – if it's too low it won't support your neck if you are involved in a rear end collision.

When you first get into the car, sit up straight and adjust the rear view mirror – this will act as a reminder every time you are tempted to slump behind the wheel.

Shopping

Carrying heavy loads in the hands and arms, on the shoulders or on the back can put a lot of stress on the joints of the spine.

Don't shop till you drop – take rests and make several short trips.

Try to avoid being laden down with too many goods – shop in smaller quantities if possible.

A rucksack, used over both shoulders is useful for carrying heavy items, leaving your arms free for lighter goods.
If you are carrying two loads, such as two bags of shopping, make sure that the weight is evenly distributed.

Gardening

Gardening can be back-breaking work, but not if you think about what you are doing:
Wear loose and comfortable clothes.

Keep your back straight and avoid prolonged bending, overstretching, stooping or squatting with a bent back as much as possible.

Try to vary the jobs and take regular breaks.

Use lightweight and long-handled gardening tools as much as possible.

When digging, stand close to the area where you are working - try not to strain or twist, dig continuously or overload the fork or spade.

If you need to use a wheelbarrow, don't overload it.

Remember kneeling to tend flowerbeds is a lot kinder to your back than bending and stretching too far for too long.

For more information please refer to the Healthy Working Lives pages on geNSS.


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