

Health and safety and older workers

Age is not a good indication of capability and does not generally determine an employee's physical ability to do a job. This section will help you to look at your health and safety policy and check that any practices or routines you operate are age neutral.

Some employers think that older workers are less capable and more likely to have accidents or take more time off work sick. In fact, many employers report benefiting from the commitment and good attendance shown by their older workers.

Evidence shows:

- In most jobs these days, productivity does not usually decline at least up to age 70, where older workers receive the same levels of training as younger workers.
- Any decline in older worker speed can be offset by better judgement based on experience.
- Poor workplace design and inflexible working practices are more likely to prevent staff from being fully effective. Physical demands from work can often be minimised through changes in work design or use of equipment.
- Older workers tend to have fewer accidents and lower levels of short-term sickness.
- The general health of older adults is improving and healthy life expectancy is increasing: on average men aged 65 can now expect to live a further 12.8 years in good or fairly good health, and women a further 14.5 years.
- The minority of older workers who do develop long-term sickness tend to self-select to leave the labour market altogether.

Managing your Health and Safety practices

- Within your business, review your health and safety policies and promote sensible working practices for employees of all ages.
- Make sure you communicate your policies to all staff.
- Ensure that all line managers carry out health and safety workplace assessments and take account of the needs of workers of all ages.
- Use your regular formal or informal discussions to engage with individuals openly about any health and safety issues they may have.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides useful facts and tips to help you make your policies age neutral.

Risk assessment

A health and safety risk assessment is an important step in protecting your workers and your business, as well as complying with the law. Simple, cheap and effective measures to manage risks can ensure your workforce is protected.

Some simple measures can include:

- assessing whether heavy lifting is really needed in a particular job or whether it can be removed;
- small changes to work areas to minimise repetitive movements;
- adjusting lighting, temperature and working conditions.

Risk assessment should be related to the job, not to the age of the employee. All staff benefit from improved working conditions and a commitment to health and safety. Further [guidance can be found within the HSE guide: Five steps to risk assessment](#).

Where a person has a disability, an employer may need to make a reasonable adjustment to enable them to do the job. Reasonable adjustment to hours, job type or equipment could help you to recruit or retain staff with valuable skills and experience. [Read the Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\) guidance on making reasonable adjustments](#).