

Vibration and Your Hands

About 8 minutes to deliver

White fingers, lost grip and lost feeling — it builds over years from ordinary tools and it does not come back.

Hand-arm vibration syndrome is not a bruise or a strain — it is permanent damage to the nerves, blood vessels and joints in your hands and arms, built up over years of ordinary tool use.

The tools that cause it are the ones everybody uses: breakers and jackhammers, grinders, needle guns, impact wrenches, chainsaws, plate compactors, chipping hammers, and long days with a rattling steering wheel.

WHAT IT DOES

- Fingers go white and numb in the cold, then red and painful as they come back. That is the vascular part, and it is where the name white finger comes from.
- Numbness and tingling that starts after work and eventually does not go away.
- Grip strength goes. People drop things, cannot do up a button, cannot pick up a small screw or feel a nut go on a thread.
- Pain in the hands, wrists and elbows, worse at night.

The important part: once the nerve damage is established it does not recover. Caught early and the exposure reduced, it can stop getting worse. Ignored for another five years, it does not.

REDUCING IT

- Use a different method where you can. A breaker attachment on a machine, a core drill instead of a chisel, a demolition saw instead of a needle gun. Not using the tool beats every other control combined.
- Sharp, well-maintained tools. A blunt bit, a worn chisel or an out-of-balance grinding wheel shakes far more and takes longer, so you get hit twice.
- The right tool for the size of the job. Fighting an undersized tool means more time and more grip.
- Let the tool do the work. Gripping harder pushes more vibration into your hands — hold it firmly enough to control it and no more.
- Low-vibration tools. Manufacturers publish vibration figures, and the difference between models is large. It is worth asking before the next purchase.
- Break it up. Rotate the task around the crew and spread it across the day rather than doing four hours straight.

KEEP YOUR HANDS WARM AND DRY

Cold makes everything about this worse — it triggers the attacks and it reduces circulation while you are being exposed. Warm gloves, hands out of the wind, and warm up before you start on a cold morning.

Anti-vibration gloves are not a solution. They help a little at some frequencies and can make you grip harder, which cancels the benefit. Treat them as warmth, not protection.

SAY SOMETHING EARLY

If your fingers have gone white in the cold, or your hands are numb in the mornings, say so now rather than in five years. There is a lot that can be changed about how the work is done — and the earlier that happens, the more of your hands you keep.

ASK THE CREW

- Who is on a breaker, grinder or impact tool for hours today?
- Has anyone's fingers gone white or numb in the cold?
- Are our tools sharp, or are people fighting blunt ones?

29 CFR 1910.132 · 29 CFR 1926.28

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

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Date

Job / site

Delivered by

Company

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I delivered this talk and determined it was suitable for this crew and this work.

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