

Occupational Health Physiotherapy and the Ageing Workforce

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What is Occupational Health

Occupational health is defined by the World Health Organisation as - an area of work in public health to promote and maintain highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations.

Its objectives are:

1. the maintenance and promotion of workers' health and working capacity;
2. the improvement of working conditions and the working environment to become conducive to safety and health;
3. the development of work organization and working cultures that should reflect essential value systems adopted by the undertaking concerned, and include effective managerial systems, personnel policy, principles for participation, and voluntary quality-related management practices to improve occupational safety and health.

The Ageing Workforce

Ageing society

In the 2021 Census there were 10.4 million people aged 65 and over in England, a 52% increase since the 1981 Census.



But the population of people aged 85 and over – currently 1.4 million – has almost doubled since the 1981 Census.

Source: ONS, Population and household estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwalescensus2021>

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Ageing society

The population aged 65 and over in the UK is projected to increase by almost a third in the next 20 years.

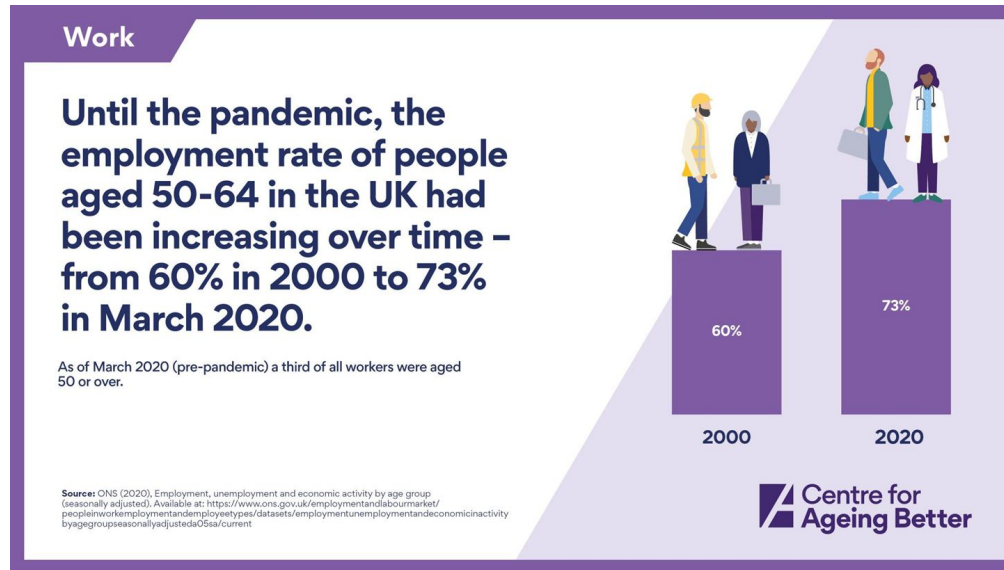


Source: ONS (2022), Principal projection - UK population in age groups. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/tablea2/principalprojectionpopulationinagegroups>

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Employment rates in the UK

- The employment rate for people aged 50 to 64 years was 71.3% in 2023.
- This rate has been increasing steadily since the mid-1990s when it stood at 57.2% in 1995.
- The employment rate for this age group was at its highest at 72.5% in 2019 and then it declined each year to 70.7% in 2022.^{7 Sept 2023 ONS}



Work

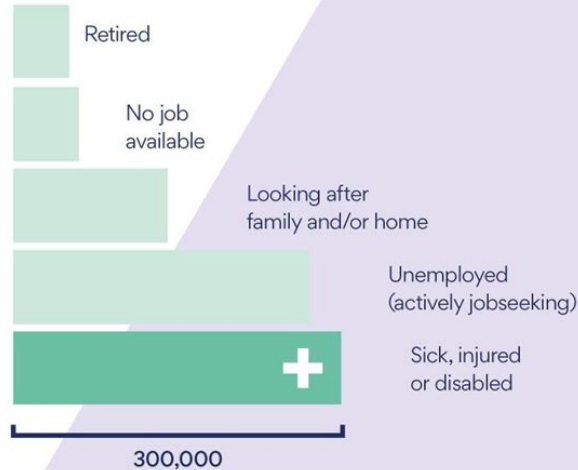
Health is the leading reason for people aged 50-64 to be out of work.

People with the fewest assets are much more likely to take early retirement because of their own health or the poor health of others.

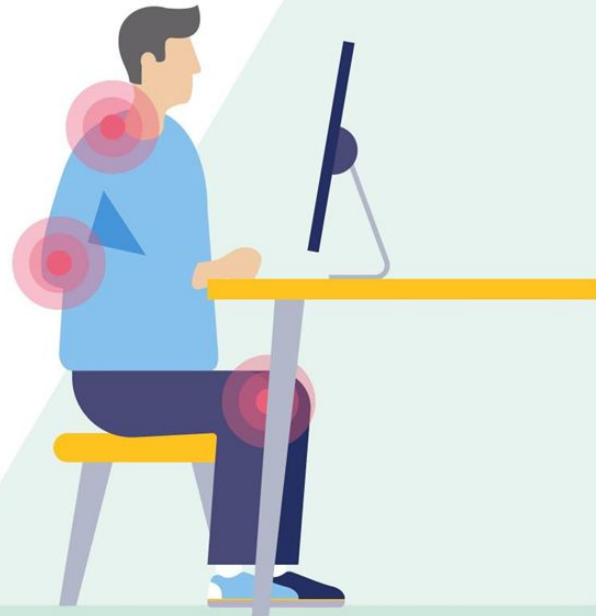
Source: Centre for Ageing Better analysis of Annual Population Survey, year to March 2020

Source: Natcen analysis for Ageing Better of English Longitudinal Study of Ageing: Wave 8, 2002-2016

Number of people who would like to be working but aren't, by reason



Musculoskeletal disorders cause the most years spent in poor health for people aged 50 and over.



Source: Global Burden of Disease (2019). Available at: <https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare/>

Low back pain is the main contributor to the overall burden of musculoskeletal conditions (570 million prevalent cases worldwide, responsible for 7.4% of global YLDs - (Years Lived with Disability)).

Other contributors to the overall burden of musculoskeletal conditions include fractures with 440 million people globally (26 million YLDs),

Osteoarthritis (528 million people; 19 million YLDs),

Neck pain (222 million people; 22 million YLDs),

Amputations (180 million people; 5.5 million YLDs),

Rheumatoid arthritis (18 million people; 2.4 million YLDs),

Gout (54 million people; 1.7 million YLDs)

Other musculoskeletal conditions (453 million people; 38 million YLDs) [data from IHME [Viz Hub](#) and [WHO Rehabilitation Needs Estimator](#)].

What is Occupational Health Physiotherapy and How can we help?

- Occupational Health services are all about helping employers and staff deal with health problems at work. Simply we are Physio's for Work and Health. We work to improve the health and wellbeing of workers so that they can do their jobs efficiently and effectively.
- Often this centres around MSK conditions but increasingly other medical problems too.
- Occupational Health is not taught on undergraduate courses, post grad training and upskilling in this speciality is required, it is not simply provision of physiotherapy services within a work environment.
- OH Physio's combine our medical knowledge, assessment and therapeutic skills with detailed analysis of workplace environments and job role demands.
- Looking to provide both the employer and employee with advice regarding such things as equipment provision, behaviour or task modification, advice around fitness for work, assistance with suggestions for altered duties or return to work plans all to assist the employer and employee mitigate risk and where possible continue with their employment.
- This is an impartial role despite often being paid for by the employer.

What are the benefits of Occupational Health Physiotherapy?

- It is widely quoted that for every £1 spent by an employer on Occupational Health Physiotherapy they save between £3-12.

This comes from

- Reduced rates Absenteeism, Reduced rates of Presenteeism, Improved Retention of staff and increased Productivity.

What do Occupational Health Phyiotherapy Services Look like?

- Onsite Clinics
- WSA / DSE
- WPA
- Mini FCE
- FCE

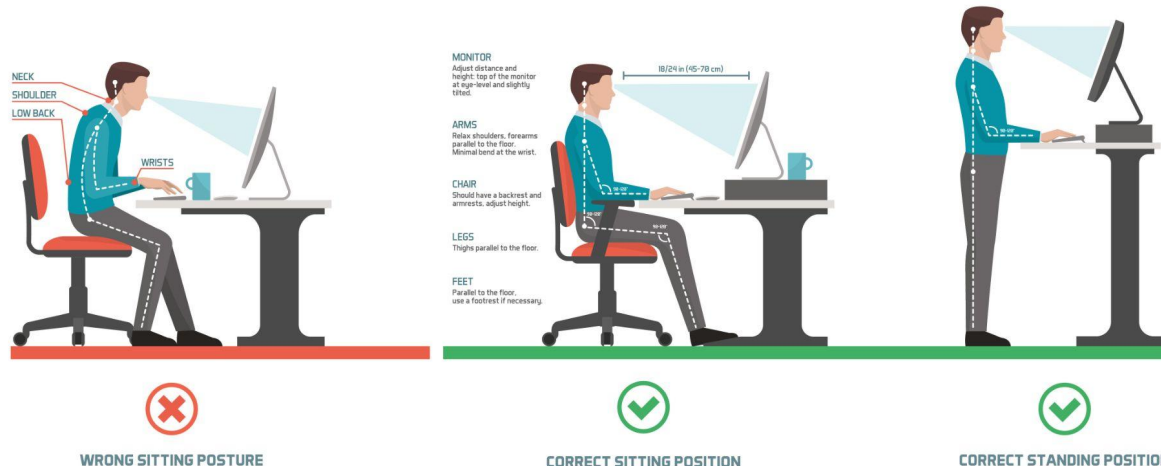
Occupational Physiotherapy interventions

Onsite Clinics

- Provide ease of access - often via self referral.
- Early intervention.
- Often a service without strict limitations of use to allow full rehabilitation.
- Provide advice around use of PMI or onward referral requests via GP.
- Convenience of access - less time lost for employees attending appointments onsite vs travelling off site or struggling to attend outside of work hours

Work Station Assessment (WSA/DSE)

- Able to take into account any medical issues and marry with the requirements of the employer to conform to DSE regulations.
- To improve comfort of staff and therefore productivity
- Clear and concise reporting with appropriate equipment recommendations and importantly offer advice around things such as additional training needs or behaviour changes.
- To save the employer money in incorrect equipment purchases.



Work

Workers aged 50 and over are the least likely to receive ‘off the job’* training, impacting their ability to keep up to date with new skills and gain further employment.

*Any training conducted in a classroom or training session, even if on the employers’ premises, is ‘off the job’ training.

‘On the job’ training means learning while actually doing the job.

Source: ONS (2022), Job related training received by employees. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/jobrelatedtrainingreceivedbyemployeesemp15>



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Work Place Assessment

- A workplace assessment involves an assessor visiting an employee's or client's place of work to look at the work environment, work tasks, physical technique, and ability. It enables us to create individual and job-specific guidance on how to support them at work and/or help them return to work safely.
- These assessments are suitable for office-based workers as well as those who have a more physically demanding role.
- They are a more indepth assessment than a WSA looking at both the employees health and the physical demands of their job role, identifying specific issues and guidance.
- These recommendations could include reasonable adjustments and modifications (such as amendments to certain duties that aggravate symptoms), phased return to work plans or adjusted hours, equipment recommendations to improve safety and comfort, as well as training needs that would benefit them.

Functional Capacity Evaluation / Mini

- It assesses physical impairments against a set of standardised testing protocols to get data-driven information. This gives us insight on how that individual manages physical activities, compared to others, as well as matches them against what they are required to do for tasks associated with their role.
- It helps to identify functional limitations and barriers that may be impacting an individual's ability to work.
- We can then provide effective guidance on what work modifications and services could be considered to support them in reaching their full potential and returning to work.
- These assessments are often required for individuals with health conditions who may be struggling at work or those who are on long-term sickness absence. For example; bone, joint, or muscle injuries, serious injury, neurological ill-health (i.e. stroke, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, brain injury), following surgery, long covid, and many other conditions.

Take Aways



Occupational Health Physiotherapy is relevant in ALL workplaces and for all employees.



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BESPOKE WELLBEING

- The ageing working population is likely to continue to rise, and with that employees suffering with ill health especially MSK conditions.
- Occupational Health Physiotherapy is an effective and efficient tool in helping this cohort of employees on multiple levels and in a plethora of work environments
- It is also economically sound to invest in Occupational Physiotherapy with every £1 spent saving the employer between £3-12
- For More information please visit ACPOHE (The Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Occupational Health and Ergonomics)
<https://acpohe.csp.org.uk/content/about-acpohe> or
<https://bespokewellbeing.co.uk/> or contact me at
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