

Blog: My Experience at The British Pepper & Spice Factory



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On the 1st of November I attended the British Pepper & Spice Factory as Osteopathic Solutions were filming a Bespoke Manual Handling Training DVD for the factory floor staff. As this was my first time on a factory floor (after joining Osteopathic Solutions in April 2018) I was unsure what to expect on this day. The first thing myself and our Director Gareth Milner were greeted with was the strong smell of pepper and spice as we walked in the factory car park which was quite pleasant as it reminded me of Indian spices and who doesn't love an Indian takeaway?! Gareth mentioned that when Osteopathic Solutions covered Manual Handling training for other Food companies such as Batchelors, Pukka Pies and others in the past, being greeted with a pleasant smell of ingredients/ food on arrival was the norm.

We proceeded to the reception where the receptionist printed off contractor badges to allow us access onto the factory floor. The Health & Safety Manager, Pawel Jurszczyk was awaiting our arrival and escorted us around all factory and distribution areas before we went to our first filming location, the end of line area on the ground floor of the factory. At this point, local Northampton videographer Lawrence Fowler of Up A Notch Productions had arrived and set up his filming kit and we were all ready to get started.

The factory floor was a very busy area with people working like clockwork. Each team member had been allocated to a specific machine or area where they performed their tasks which appeared to be very repetitive. Their bodily movements were quite robotic with some having low risk manual handling tasks and others noticeably high risk for musculoskeletal injuries.

The first area where we began to film the employees' natural practices was at the end of the line where a female operative was transferring small, glass spice jars from a pallet at an ergonomic/ backsafe raised level (by a fork lift) on to a machine ready to be labelled (shown in the photos below). This task was quite low risk, but involved her body twisting repetitively from left to right as she grabbed 5 or so jars on each hand, before removing them from the

pallet and onto the conveyer belt. Gareth advised it would be best to alternate her bodily movements by changing position and doing an hour on one side and an hour on the other to reduce the likelihood of repetitive strain injury (RSI) to the spine and knees.



Moving along the production line area, a lot of the tasks were quite low risk in terms of musculoskeletal disorders but operatives will still benefit greatly from Osteopathic Solutions' Bespoke Manual Handling DVD guidance to avoid any workplace manual handling related injuries or repetitive strain injuries (RSIs). In the next area of the end of line, a staff member was transferring finished product pepper jars (shown in the photo below) from the machine to the pallet. As her task involved a lot of stretching of one arm it was advised by Gareth to alternate arms frequently to reduce the likelihood of manual handling related injuries.



The next task we moved on to was the removal of cardboard into a machine which again, was a low risk task for manual handling related injuries. Always ensuring loads were accessible from waist height to limit bending and overstretching is recommended and thankfully, a lot of the end of line tasks were.

British Pepper & Spice had a machine which shrink wrapped items which was a great benefit as not all food factories have this facility, and shrink wrapping manually can be very draining physically and a high-risk task for a manual handling injury. Below you can see the large pallets filled with pepper containers after being shrink wrapped from the machine. You can

imagine the postural strain on the musculoskeletal system that this manual task would cause if the factory floor staff did not have access to a shrink-wrapping machine.



As we viewed each manual handling task being performed in its own environment, Lawrence our videographer took time to capture it precisely on his Canon 1080p camera as I stood alongside him taking notes on each manual handling task and learning more about the Food Factory environment which was very new to me. Each task was so uniquely different in its own way so it was great that British Pepper & Spice had chosen Osteopathic Solutions to do their Bespoke Manual Handling DVD, as I don't think an 'Off the Shelf' DVD would have the same effect, regarding engagement whilst watching and reduction in manual handling lost time accidents.

As their Health & Safety Manager Pawel directed us to other areas of the factory, I began to notice the more high-risk manual handling tasks. One of the common manual handling tasks on the factory floor was pushing and pulling of heavy pallet loads. These pallets were full to the brim with finished product weighing approximately 750 kg in total weight.



This was one of the areas we spent some time capturing footage as Gareth demonstrated best practice pushing and pulling techniques. Also demonstrated was team pushing and pulling, which Gareth taught me how to correctly perform beside him using the commands "Ready, Steady, Push" or "Ready, Steady, Pull," depending on our direction.

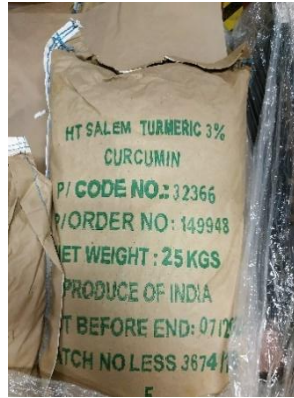
Some staff members were carrying out this manual handling task with good practice, pushing from their powerful leg muscles helping to protect their lower back; others dragged and pulled quickly with little thought into their actions, resulting in likely future chronic musculoskeletal disorders and potential workplace manual handling related injuries.



In the photos above Gareth was teaching me best practice, BackSafe use of a pallet truck. Many people may think, and myself included in the past, that good manual handling technique only applies to lifting, carrying and lowering of loads. Pushing and pulling of loads especially using a pallet truck filled with heavy goods weighing 750 kg and sometimes more, is a very high-risk manual handling task. When British Pepper & Spice receive our Bespoke Manual Handling DVD, they will be able to teach their employees our BackSafe manual handling techniques and apply them to their daily routines, resulting in a safer workforce practices.



In the left photo above Gareth is demonstrating best practice, BackSafe pulling technique of a heavy pallet truck load as he faces the load enabling him to control its movement. Notice how his feet are positioned with one foot in front of the other with the hips and knees bent into a semi squat allowing for a powerful, BackSafe movement.



In the photo above, you can see the type of content and weight on these pallets. This is a 25kg bag of cumin, all the way from India. You can imagine the weight of 25 of these on a pallet and the total load weight's impact on the musculoskeletal system if pushing and pulling is not practised safely.



Above on the left you can see the total weight these pallet trucks allow which is a hefty maximum weight of 2500kg. On the right, I am carrying out my first pull of a load across the factory floor. Upon attempting to pull the pallet for the first time, I truly felt its weight as I struggled to move the goods. Yet at the same time, I noticed staff members effortlessly moving them as they were so used to doing so. Upon taking on some Osteopathic Solutions BackSafe manual handling guidance of facing the load and placing my hands safely on it before driving my body backwards with my leg muscles, it ran smoother than expected!

After filming best practice pushing and pulling of a pallet truck loads, their Health & Safety Manager Pawel took us to another floor where a large machine was dispersing cinnamon and required a staff member to mechanically pour cinnamon into an empty bag before it was manually transferred onto a pallet. This was a high-risk manual handling task for musculoskeletal disorders as each bag weighed 25kg when full. We filmed this task as it was naturally being carried out by a staff member, before Gareth demonstrated best practise squat lifting and lowering of the cinnamon bag which the department operatives can refer to after watching the finished DVD. As this task was filmed in its natural environment, it will truly help any current or future staff members carry out this task in a safe manner. In the below photos a team member is filling his bag with spice until it reaches the 25kg capacity before he will seal it up and transfer it on to a pallet. Gareth is also in view as he

demonstrates the best practice lifting and lowering of the load for the camera. Notice how he keeps the load close to his chest and bends through his hips and knees making full use of his leg muscle power.



In the image below Lawrence and Gareth are filming footage of the natural, unsafe practice of the 25kg load being placed onto the pallet. The staff member's back is bent forward and his neck is arched forward in an uncomfortable position as he has just lowered the load.



Lifting and lowering of heavy loads was a common high-risk manual handling practice on this floor and a lot of staff members were required to do this for lengthy hours so referring to safe manual handling practice on their new Osteopathic Solutions training DVD for the company is crucial for everyone.

The next task we looked at was the pouring of bags of pepper into a machine to be grinded. This repetitive task involved the lifting of a 25kg bag of pepper from a pallet onto a hopper before the bag was slit open using a knife, and its contents were poured into the grinding machine. Gareth discussed a vacuum lifter with the Health & Safety Manager which would remove the need for manual handling.

Below left, a team member is carrying out her task of pouring the pepper into the machine. Below right, Lawrence of Up A Notch Productions, is filming the Health & Safety Manager carry out best practice lifting of a bag of pepper for the DVD with Gareth observing.



After this we moved into a store room where carrying of goods off the shelf was performed by myself and Gareth for the DVD. The loads were large rolls of sticky labels used for packaging up the pepper and spices for supermarkets. On first instance, they looked small and easy to carry but they were actually very heavy for what they were. Gareth performed an unsafe, natural practice first (pictured below) by carrying the load perched on his shoulder before demonstrating the correct BackSafe manual handling practice. He taught me how to safely lift the load by simply standing close to it and grasping it with both hands before lifting it with both arms, centrally positioned and close to the stomach. This helps spread the load weight across both shoulders. He reminded me that loads should be held close to the body's centre of gravity.



The next filming task was carried out within the warehouse and covered unsafe but natural single handed lifting tasks as well as lunge lifting and lowering. In the photo below to the left we see the lunge lift being performed by Gareth with a fire extinguisher. The lunge position to lift and lower loads is an alternative to the squat technique that is commonly preferred by people who have a current or previous spinal disc injury. It should only be practised with small, moderate weight loads 10kg or under, like the fire extinguisher. In the photo below to the right we see their Health & Safety Manager performing an unsafe lift of a bucket of spice. This is unsafe as he is carrying with the arm straight but with no load carried out by the other arm.



The below photo on the left shows their Health & Safety Manager performing a safe carrying practice of a bucket of spice, but can you spot the slight error in his grip? The bucket of spice is held as it should be, close to the body's centre of gravity. The right photo shows Gareth safely performing a squat lift of the same bucket of spice. Seeing the correct lifting techniques of different shaped objects has helped me understand more about the varying manual handling techniques and correct practices to apply.



After finishing this task, we moved back to an area to perform more BackSafe lifting and carrying of loads for the staff to refer to who worked in that area. Boxes of varying sizes were stacked in this area and of varying weights too. Gareth firstly demonstrated lifting and lowering of a small box, before moving on to a large sized box which was quite difficult to carry due to its weight and size. As it was hard to grip and manoeuvre Gareth decided it would probably be more suitable for a two person lift, so we both demonstrated this manual handling practice for the DVD. After the shorter communication of 'Ready, Lift' we coordinated the lift and carry of the large box before saying the words 'Ready, Down' as we lowered ourselves and the box to the floor.



After this section was fully covered and filmed, we proceeded to carry out some pushing and pulling practical, this time with a large commercial bin. Gareth asked two staff members if we could borrow the bin they were moving to carry out this task. This manual handling task, if not taught correctly, places a lot of mechanical strain on the neck, shoulders and lower back so it was good to see it performed correctly in its working environment. As the bins can often be packed to the brim and very heavy, myself and Gareth also carried out team pushing and pulling practice.

Below, you can see Gareth carrying out best practise pulling of the bin. To initiate movement he bends his hips and knees into a semi squat, whilst keeping his spine upright as he faces the load. He also ensured there were no obstacles in his path.

Although the handles of the bin were built in to the bin, Gareth demonstrated that the best positioning of the hands was actually to place them closer together (pictured below on the right) as the built in positioning was actually too far apart and uncomfortable for the shoulders when performing BackSafe pushing and pulling.





Another common task carried out on factory floor is the movement of CHEP pallets. Many staff members of factory floors often treat this as a one person task. Manoeuvring or lifting of a pallet on your own can be hazardous for the musculoskeletal system as it is simply hard to grip and too big. Best practice when lifting CHEP pallets is always with 2 people, with them being so bulky and heavy. In the below image Pawel and Gareth practise a team lift of a plastic pallet on the factory floor for the Bespoke Manual Handling DVD. Before coordinating the movement Gareth announced "Ready, Brace, Lift," while they both ensured they had a straight stretch of ground with no obstacles facing them. To set it down again the team leader (Gareth) issued the command "Ready, Brace, Down."



To wrap up the day of filming, Gareth checked through his list to ensure everything had been covered.

I truly feel after spending time in the British Pepper & Spice food factory environment and seeing all of the manual handling tasks being performed in their surroundings, that it has strengthened my knowledge of manual handling (and Spinal health) within my position of Training Administrator & Social Media Manager for Osteopathic Solutions. Reading about correct manual handling techniques within the Osteopathic Solutions Instructor Assessor Course Booklet was helpful over the last 6 months with the company, but seeing the tasks performed directly in front of me within their working environment has helped me gain a better understanding of the subject matter. Having spent the day watching the filming take place live, I am really looking forward to seeing the finished product as I think it will be of very high quality. Lawrence was a great videographer to work with and Gareth helped to explain everything thoroughly to me if there was any task or factory machinery I was unsure of, as he is so familiar with the varied factory environments. It was completely new to me

seeing the vast amounts of huge mechanical equipment and smelling the strong smells within different areas of the food factory. I am already looking forward to attending and documenting the next Bespoke Manual Handling filming for Osteopathic Solutions within its industry.

Thanks for reading.