

# Medical Management of Musculoskeletal Disorders

## An Essential Part of an MSD Solutions Program

**The goal of medical management is to prevent pain, physical impairment and disability, and ensure a safe return to work for all employees who experience an musculoskeletal disorder (MSD).**

An effective MSD medical management program requires collaboration between your organization, the injured employee and the health care provider (HCP).

This visual flowchart can equip your MSD solutions team to effectively collaborate and move through the four phases of MSD Medical Management at work.

### Early Reporting & Detection

Create systems to encourage all employees to (identify and) report early signs and symptoms of MSDs. Early detection reduces overall pain and chances of disability for the injured employee. Include this information in ongoing employee trainings and communications.

### Job Intervention

Following the report of an MSD or signs and symptoms of an MSD, the employer should take immediate steps to identify and reduce exposure to risk factors in the employee's job. This will prevent future MSDs among other employees performing the same job.

### Referral For Diagnosis & Treatment

If an employee needs ongoing treatment for an MSD, collaboration with an HCP is critical for proper diagnosis and treatment of MSDs. Keep an open line of communication and provide the HCP with information about the work performed by the injured employee.

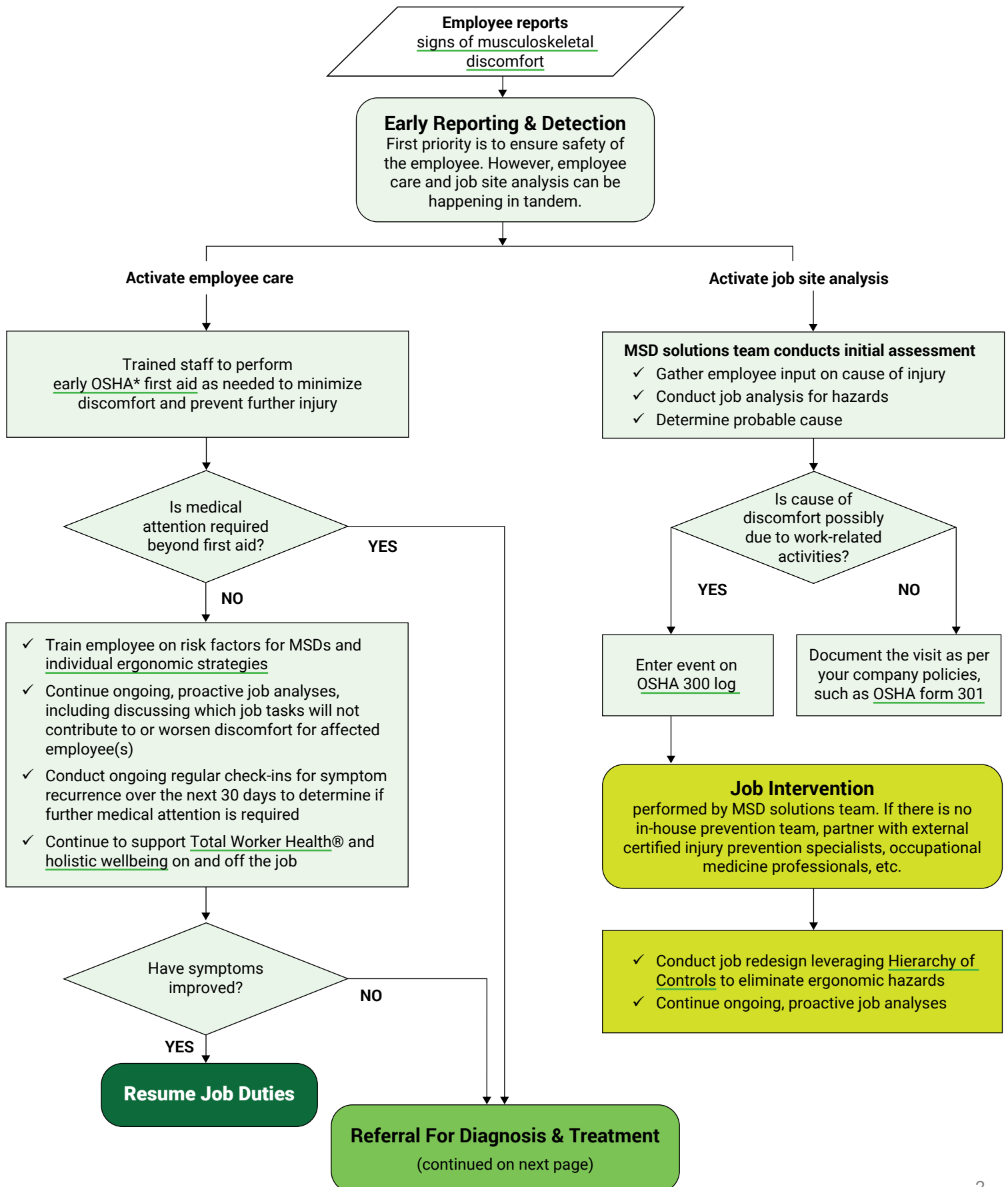
### Return to Work

Employers may need to accommodate temporary job restrictions to safely return an injured employee to work. Work adjustments may be needed upon return. A successful return to work plan requires collaboration between your organization and the HCP.

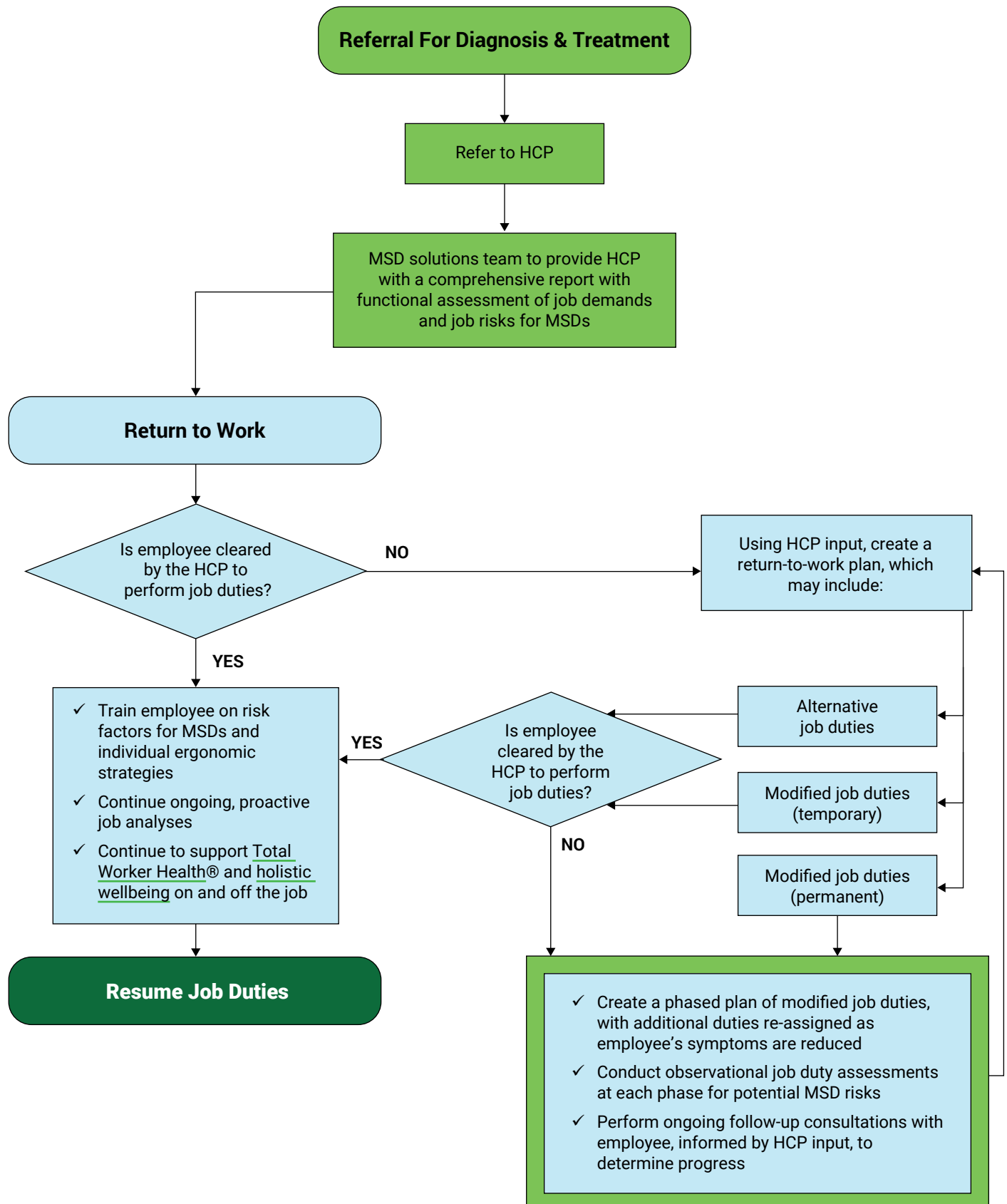
### Essentials of MSD Prevention:

- ✓ Establish protocols for MSD solutions program management
- ✓ Implement systems for routine MSD surveillance and related hazards
- ✓ Cultivate a psychologically safe culture that supports early reporting
- ✓ Conduct proactive job analyses to identify hazards
- ✓ Prioritize ergonomic job design and intervention to minimize risk factors
- ✓ Train employees in identifying and reporting ergonomic hazards and risk factor awareness

# MSD Medical Management at Work: A Flowchart



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## A Critical Intersection: MSD Medical Management and the Opioid Epidemic

Complications and fatalities due to opioid use have increased over the last two decades and continue rising. As a national public health emergency, opioid use also incurs a tremendous cost to businesses as it impairs employee focus, attention and reaction time. These impairments can result in increased risk to the health and safety of all employees.

Chronic pain resulting from an MSD increases the risks associated with opioid use (including misuse, overdose and addiction). Employers can play a critical role in MSD prevention by incorporating interventions for substance misuse and recovery into an MSD Medical Management strategy. Due to the ongoing opioid epidemic's impact on holistic employee health and MSD Medical Management, employers are encouraged to incorporate opioid awareness in their workplace health and safety programs with the following suggestions.

- Establish robust company policies in support of a Opioid Overdose Response Program and Recovery Ready workplace. This includes ensuring the availability of overdose reversal medications on-site and providing benefits for the treatment of substance use disorders, along with coverage for non-opioid alternatives for managing MSD pain.
- Foster a psychologically safe and stigma-free culture that encourages employees to seek treatment if they are concerned about their substance use.
- Proactively train and educate your workforce on warning signs of substance misuse, harm reduction strategies, and options for recovery.
- During injury assessments, ask open-ended questions to determine if there may have been impairment of focus, attention, or reaction time. This presents an opportunity to initiate a supportive conversation about substance use.
- Eliminate job hazards to reduce risk of injuries and subsequent necessity for MSD pain management for future employees.
- During symptom check-ins, inquire about pain management strategies and offer recommendations for non-opioid alternatives. If opioids have been prescribed, ensure employees are trained to recognize signs of misuse and are aware of available company resources for treatment and support.
- Collaborate proactively with HCPs in your network to ensure that non-opioid alternatives are routinely considered in pain management. Provide employees with training and education to advocate for non-opioid options when discussing treatment with HCPs.
- Include reminders for endorsing non-opioid pain management in functional job assessments provided to HCPs.
- Support ongoing Total Worker Health® and holistic wellbeing, including prevention and treatment for substance use disorders.

## Additional Helpful Resources

**Department of Labor:** <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/topics/saw-rtw/about>

**Occupational Health and Safety:** <https://www.osha.gov/ergonomics/identify-problems>

**The Americans with Disability Act (ADA):** <https://www.ada.gov/>

**Job Accommodation Network:** <https://askjan.org/topics/return.cfm>

**Ergonomics Program Management Guidelines For Meatpacking Plants:** <https://www.osha.gov/publications/OSHA3123>

**ACOEEM's Occupational Medicine Practice Guidelines:** <https://acoem.org/Practice-Resources>

**Clinical Guidance to Optimize Work Participation After Injury or Illness: The Role of Physical Therapists:**

<https://www.apta.org/patient-care/evidence-based-practice-resources/cpgs/clinical-guidance-to-optimize-work-participation-after-injury-or-illness-the-role-of-physical-therapists>

**Improving Pain Management and Support for Workers with Musculoskeletal Disorders: Policies to Prevent Work Disability and Job Loss, Vol. 1 – Policy Action Paper:** [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/topics/pdf/pap\\_msk-pain%20vol%201\\_2017-08-29.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/odep/topics/pdf/pap_msk-pain%20vol%201_2017-08-29.pdf)

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