

## Back Injury Prevention

Lifting, carrying, and reaching are leading causes of workplace injuries. Because lifting is very much a part of everyday life, we have a tendency to lift without much consideration — until there's an injury.

By learning proper lifting techniques and the basics of back safety, you may be able to save yourself a lot of pain and a lifetime of back problems.

### Common Causes of Back Injuries

Many back injuries are the result of cumulative damage suffered over a long period of time. However, these actions, motions, and movements are more likely to cause and contribute to back injuries than others:

- Heavy lifting
- Lifting or carrying objects with awkward or odd shapes
- Reaching and lifting
- Sitting or standing too long in one position
- Slipping on a wet floor or ice
- Twisting at the waist while lifting or holding a heavy load
- Working in awkward, uncomfortable positions

Anytime you find yourself doing one of these things, you should think: DANGER! My back is at risk!

### How to Prevent Back Injuries

The best way to prevent back injuries is to develop habits that reduce the strain placed on your back. Here are some basic tips you can try to avoid injury:

#### Avoid Lifting and Bending

- Store objects above ground level to avoid reaching down to pick things up.
- Adjust shelves between shoulder and waist height for the best lifting zone. Place heavier objects on shelves at waist level and lighter objects on lower or higher shelves.
- Use carts and dollies or a partner to move objects rather than carry them by yourself.

#### Always Use Proper Lifting Techniques

- Size up the load and ask for assistance, if needed.
- Size up the area. Look over the area where you are carrying the object and make sure it is clear of obstacles and debris before moving the object.
- Take a balanced stance with your feet about a shoulder-width apart. One foot can be behind the object and the other next to it.
- Squat down to lift the object using your legs, but keep your heels off the floor. Get as close to the object as you can.
- Use your palms, not just your fingers, to get a secure grip on the load. Make sure you'll be able to maintain a hold on the object without readjusting your grip later.

- Lift gradually, without jerking, by using your leg, abdominal, and buttock muscles and keeping the load as close to you as possible. Keep your chin tucked in to keep a relatively straight back and neck line.
- Keep your balance with footwork.
- Let your leg muscles do the work. Leg muscles are more powerful and more durable than back muscles.
- Change directions by pointing your feet in the direction you want to go and turning your whole body. Avoid twisting at your waist while carrying a load.
- When you put a load down, use these same guidelines in reverse.

### **Body Management**

- Stretch before lifting. Stretching prepares the body for movement and will help you avoid painful strains and sprains.
- Slow down. If you're doing a lot of heavy, repetitive lifting, take it slowly. Allow yourself recovery time between lifts as well. Don't overdo it.
- Rest your back. Take frequent, short breaks. Taking a one minute stretch break every now and then helps to prevent stiffness and soreness.
- Sleep on a firm mattress. The best sleeping position for many people is either on their back with knees slightly elevated by a pillow, or on their side with knees slightly bent.
- Get in shape and increase your flexibility. Strengthening your stomach muscles and controlling your weight will reduce the amount of stress on your back.

Remember to practice good lifting mechanics by sizing up the load and asking for help if you need it. Get a good grip on the load to be lifted, keep the load close, and keep your balance with footwork. Let your leg muscles do the work, not your back. Move your feet when changing directions of travel – don't twist your body.

Staying in good physical condition and practicing proper lifting techniques will help ensure many rewarding hours of work and play. Start today and you'll be on your way to having a healthier back.