

FitFacts®



Back Pain at Work

LOW-BACK PAIN IS A LEADING CAUSE OF JOB-RELATED DISABILITY AND MISSED WORK IN THE UNITED STATES. THE PAIN IS SO UNBEARABLE THAT AMERICANS SPEND MORE THAN \$50 BILLION PER YEAR IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE IT GO AWAY. IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING WORK-RELATED BACK PAIN, HERE ARE SOME BACK-PROTECTING TIPS THAT MAY BRING YOU RELIEF:

1. **Lift wisely.** Take your time, get help when needed, use lifting devices, and alternate heavy lifting with less physically demanding tasks. Follow the rules of good posture while lifting:
 - Place feet at least shoulder-width apart.
 - Stand as close as possible to the object being lifted.
 - Hold the object as close to your body as you can.
 - Avoid twisting or bending forward when lifting and carrying.
 - Bend at the knees instead of the waist.
 - Tighten your stomach muscles when lifting and lowering.
2. **Avoid prolonged sitting and standing.** Walk and stretch hourly if possible.
 - For sitters: Place a rolled towel, small pillow or a specially designed seat support behind your lower back.
 - For standers: Distribute weight evenly on both feet.
3. **Sit with good form.** Align ears with the shoulders and keep chin parallel to the floor. Avoid leaning to one side and bend at the hips instead of rounding shoulders when leaning forward. Choose a supportive swivel chair with the following features:
 - Adjustable seat and arm rests
 - An adjustable back rest with a spring that moves with you
 - A seat that tilts forward
4. **Modify your workspace to fit your needs.**
 - Place your computer and other frequently used objects close to you.
 - Avoid neck pain by using a headset or special phone adapter for phone calls.
5. **Make your health a priority.** This is an important, commonly overlooked way to reduce your risk for back pain.
 - **Lose a modest amount of weight.** Even a small loss of 5–10% of your current body weight decreases stress on the muscles, ligaments, and joints in the back.
 - **Quit smoking.** It's true, kicking the habit for good will help your back feel better.

- **Exercise regularly.** This is more effective than bed rest in helping to relieve and prevent chronic low-back pain. A [quality exercise program](#) includes aerobic activity, strength training, and stretching.
6. **Visit your health care provider** if the above recommendations have not provided relief or you have concerns about your condition. Further testing and intervention may be necessary.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke](#)

[Medline Plus](#)

[American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons](#)