

BACK SAFETY: Back to Basics

Preventing a back injury is much easier than repairing one. Since your back is critically important to your ability to perform all daily activities including your job. Most pain arises from using your back improperly, so learning a few basic rules about lifting, posture and proper exercise can help keep your back in good shape.

EXERCISE TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BACK

Having strong back and stomach muscles is important in order to support the work your back is put through each day. By doing simple back-toning exercises, you not only strengthen your back, but can also reduce stress and improve your posture.

MAINTAIN GOOD POSTURE

You can prevent many back pains by learning to sit, stand and lift items correctly. When you sit down, don't slouch. Slouching makes the back ligaments, not the muscles, stretch and hurt, thus putting pressure on the vertebrae. Learn to stand tall with your head up and shoulders back.

PLAN YOUR LIFT

Lifting objects is often a mindless task, and unfortunately many people perform lifts incorrectly, which results in unnecessary strain on their back and surrounding muscles. In order to lift correctly and reduce strain on your back, it's important to plan your lift in advance. This means to think about the weight of the object you will be moving and the distance you will be moving it. Is it bulky? Will you need help? Do you see any hazards that can be eliminated? Think about this each time you do any lifting.

POSITION YOURSELF CORRECTLY IN FRONT OF THE LOAD

Once you have your lift planned, the next important step is to align yourself correctly in front of the load. One foot slightly in front of the other for balance. Slowly squat down by bending your knees, not your back and stomach. Using both hands, firmly grab the load and bring it as close to your body as you can. This will help distribute the weight of the load over your feet and make the move easier.

LIFT WITH YOUR LEGS, NOT YOUR BACK

Once the load is close to your body, slowly straighten out your legs until you are standing upright. Make sure the load isn't blocking your vision as you begin to walk slowly to your destination. If you need to turn to the side, turn by moving your feet around and not twisting at your waist.



ASK FOR HELP, IF NEEDED

If the load is too heavy, bulky, or awkward for you to lift alone, find a friend to help you carry it. If not one is available, is it possible to break the load into two smaller loads? Or, can you locate a cart or dolly to help you move it? Look for simple solutions to help make the move easier on you and your back.

SET THE LOAD DOWN CORRECTLY

Once you have reached your destination, it's equally important that the load is set down correctly. By reversing the above lifting procedures you can reduce the strain on your back and stomach muscles. If you set your load on the ground, squat down by bending your knees and position the load out in front of you. If the load is set down at table height, set the load down slowly and maintain your contact with it until you are sure the load is secure and will not fall when you leave.

SAFE LIFTING & HANDLING TIPS

- Think of your tender toes. If something heavy drops, always keep those toes of yours under protective cover; wear safety shoes.
- Think of your hands. Wear good tough gloves when you handle anything rough, sharp or splintery.
- Lift smoothly, don't jerk as you lift. Don't twist your body when carrying a load; pivot with your feet instead of your spine.
- See that fingers and toes stay in the clear when lifting and handling
- Push rather than pull. Use equipment (dollies, carts, two-wheelers, hydraulic/electrical hoists or lifts) to move loads whenever possible.
- Make sure work levels are at waist height when standing and elbow height when sitting whenever possible.

REMEMBER!

Play it safe and smart - Stick with the basics in all of your lifting and handling of materials and equipment.

Safety Starts with You!



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