



Weekly Safety Meeting

Your Safety Is Our Business®

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Back Safety

Eight out of 10 Americans will eventually suffer a back injury or have some type of back pain. Back injuries are often difficult to treat and can result in lengthy and costly rehabilitation. It is important to stay healthy and in good shape so that we can do our jobs better and safer.

The back is a network of fragile ligaments, discs, and muscles that can easily be thrown out of order. The back's complex design breaks down when it's forced to perform activities it was not designed to do. Lifting with the back twisted or bent just begs for a pulled muscle or ruptured disc. One sure way to risk injuring the back is to lift heavy or bulky loads improperly or unassisted. Never be afraid to ask for help with loads that you know you cannot lift safely. Lift with good sense and a little extra help from a co-worker or mechanical aid when necessary.

Following basic principles are useful to guide the design of everyday lifting tasks:

- Use proper lifting techniques when manually lifting material. Spread your feet slightly apart, bend your knees, keep your back arched and the load close. Grip the object with a firm grasp. Use your strong leg muscles instead of the weaker and smaller back muscles to bring you and the load to a standing position. Make the lift under control. Do not make quick jerky moves.
- Move material once. Plan jobs so you avoid lifting and lowering the same material several times.
- Use the force of gravity when possible. Convert lifting/lowering tasks into pushing/pulling.
- Avoid extreme body joint movement.
- Avoid static muscle loading (exertion without movement).
- Give support to the body.
- Do not complete tasks that require extreme twisting or reaching behind you.
- Plan lifts so that they take place between waist and shoulder height.
- Use tools or personal protective equipment to reduce vibration.

Following these principles can help to reduce job related back injuries and back pain. Using good lifting and working techniques can also improve production and reduce job related stress.

Good ergonomic job design, including proper workplace layout, appropriate use of mechanical lifting aids, appropriate seat design, optimum work levels, sit/stand workstations, and matching object weights to human capabilities can go far toward reducing low back injuries. Ergonomic job design can reduce work-related back injuries by up to 33% according to some sources.

When manual lifts are unavoidable, you must use proper lifting techniques. However, good equipment design and pre-job planning should be the first approach attempted in the prevention of back injuries. Eliminating manual lifts of material also eliminates the possibility of injuring your back while doing so.

Lifting's a breeze when you bend at the knees!!

