

LIFTING & BACK PROTECTION

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), more than one million workers experience back injuries each year. One fourth of all worker's compensation claims are a result of back

injuries. Low back pain is one of the most common reasons people miss work, second only to the common cold. A BLS survey shows that 75% of back injuries occurred while performing lifting tasks, which stresses the importance of reducing back injuries caused by lifting.

Back disorders can develop gradually as a result of repetitive activity over time or can be the product of a single traumatic event. Back pain is often ignored until the symptoms become serious, often resulting in disabling injury. Serious back injuries can be the immediate result of improper lifting techniques and/or lifting loads that are too heavy for the back to support.

Here are a few common types of lifting activities in our industry that contribute to back injuries: moving heavy packaged materials (such as 5 gallon buckets, 22 and 55 gallon drums, boxed sheet goods), masonry, and metals. Working in a bent or crouched position (such as saw cutting, grinding, or ground level preparation and installations) can contribute to back injuries.

Contributing Factors Associated with Back Disorders:

- Poor physical condition – not having the strength to perform physical tasks without strain
- Bad body mechanics – how someone lifts, pushes, pulls, or carries objects
- Repetitive lifting of awkward items, such as material or equipment
- Heavy lifting
- Fatigue
- Poor conditions or design of the work site – uneven ground, obstacles, or slip/trip/fall hazards
- Bending, twisting, or reaching while lifting
- Staying in one position for too long
- Stressful living and working activities



Proper Lifting Tips:

- **Always warm-up:** Perform simple back and leg exercises **before** performing any lifting tasks.
- **Plan ahead:** Know what you are going to be lifting, especially the weight and size of the object and if it's safe to lift on your own. Make sure the work area is flat, dry and clear of debris. Stage the work area when possible to limit the need to move heavy objects. Proper staging includes placing materials as close as possible to work spaces, and storing materials at ideal heights so employees can utilize the power zone (close to the body, between mid-thigh and mid-chest height) to take materials from storage.
- **Check your pathway:** Make sure the pathway is clear. Remove and tripping hazards or debris. Check for any wet or slick surfaces and uneven ground.
- **Use ergonomic equipment:** Use lift assists, such as: forklifts, dollies, carts, hand trucks, or hoists. Make sure you are trained before using the equipment.
- **Get help when needed:** When lifting awkward or heavy loads, utilize a two-person lift. Make sure you lift at the same time and keep the load level.
- **Wear proper shoes:** Wear appropriate shoes based on the lifting task.

Proper Lifting Techniques:

- Get as close to the object as possible.
- Use a wide stance with one foot forward and to the side of the object for good balance.
- Keep your back straight, push your buttocks out, and use your legs and hips to lower yourself down to the object.
- Use this basic lifting technique for small objects when you can straddle the load and use a wide stance.
- Grasp the object firmly with both hands.
- Prepare for the lift, tighten your core muscles, look forward and upward, keep a straight and strong back.
- Lift slowly and follow your head and shoulders. Hold the load close to your body. Lift by extending your legs with your back straight, and breathe out as you lift.

THINGS YOU SHOULD DO IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Always warm up with stretching exercises for your legs and back before lifting loads.
- Plan ahead by inspecting your work areas to identify and correct hazards before moving loads.
- Lift as a team and use equipment like hand trucks or dolly's to limit carrying distances.
- Use your legs and buttocks muscles with correct foot stance and position when lifting loads.
- Wear a back brace during lifting activities only to help with posture

THINGS YOU SHOULD NOT DO IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Do Not lift bulky or heavy loads alone.
- Do Not twist when lifting or lowering loads.
- Do Not carry loads across wet, slick, or uneven surfaces.
- Do Not perform lifting activities if you are fatigued. Get someone else to help you or use lift assist equipment.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) Which of the following is an unsafe practice when lifting loads?
 - a) Warming up with stretching exercises prior to lifting
 - b) Keeping your back straight and using your legs to lower yourself down to the load
 - c) Lifting a heavy load and carrying the load across a wet floor
 - d) Using hand trucks for loads too heavy or bulky to carry
- 2) Plan ahead and make sure your pathway is clear before you perform any lifting activities
 - a) True:
 - b) False
- 3) If using the two-person lift, it is important to keep the load level while you are moving it.
 - a) True
 - b) False

Talk Given By: _____ Date: _____
Company: _____ Location: _____

Printed Name

Signature

Printed Name	Signature

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthy workplace and workers have rights. OSHA can help answer questions or concerns from employers and workers. OSHA's On-site Consultation Program offers free and confidential advice to small and medium-sized businesses, with priority given to high-hazard worksites. For more information, contact your regional or area OSHA office, call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), or visit www.osha.gov.

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