



Risk Control Newsletter

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Back Safety Facts

Strains and sprains are the leading cause of workplace injuries and illnesses, and the back and shoulders are the parts of the body most affected. According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), back injuries account for nearly 20 percent of all injuries and illnesses in the workplace, which impact more than 1 million workers. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), back injuries cost the nation an estimated \$20 billion to \$50 billion per year; one-fourth of all compensation indemnity claims involve back injuries. NIOSH believes that the most effective way to prevent back injury is to implement an ergonomics program that focuses on redesigning the work environment and work tasks to reduce the hazards of lifting.



Prevent Back Injuries

If you've ever suffered from a pulled muscle, sprain, charley horse, or backache, chances are you could have prevented it. More than 250,000 workers a year incur some kind of muscle injury. These are most often the result of using improper lifting methods, although climbing in and out of trucks, pushing heavy objects, or an awkward reach or bend can do the damage.

Your back is one part of the body that can never quite return to its former delicate structure after an injury, because repairs are rarely 100 percent effective. That's why it's so important to take precautions that can prevent the injury in the first place.

Let me repeat what I said at the start: The most common source of muscle ache and pain is poor lifting methods. One work injury out of four results from incorrect handling procedures or from using the wrong materials. When you straighten up after bending over, the muscles, vertebrae, ligaments, and discs in your back bear more than a quarter of a ton of strain. If you lift with your back at the same time, the weight of the object is multiplied 15 times.

Translated into lost time from work, such aches and pains cost millions of dollars a year, most of which is spent on pain killers in a futile search for relief. Because we bring most muscle aches and pains on ourselves, the best medicine is a dose of prevention.

These reminders may help you on the job:

- Gear your activity to your age and physical condition. Physical exertion is an excellent body builder, but it should not be carried to excess. Stop and rest when you feel tired.
- When entering or leaving a truck cab, use the handgrips and make sure the step-ups are dry and clear.
- If you have a job that allows little movement, it is important to watch your posture and change your working position as often as you can. Don't become tense—rest the muscles that are constantly in use.

Take time each day to remind yourself of what you are doing. In short, use your head to save your back.



**To lift and carry safely,
use your legs, not your back.**



To pick up a load:

- Stand close to the load
- Bend your knees—maintain your back's natural curves
- Grip the load firmly
- Push your body up slowly and smoothly with your legs
- Don't twist your body



To put it down:

- Don't twist your body
- Bend your knees to lower the load
- Place the load on the edge of a surface, then slide it back.

To use a two-person lift:

- Lifters should be about the same height, if possible
- Put one person in charge of saying when and where to move
- Lift and raise at the same time
- Keep the load level
- Unload at the same time



**Which would you rather
do—ask for help or face
a lifetime of back pain?**

Get Smart About Materials-Handling Safety



- ✓ Plan ahead—don't make a move until you've thought it out.
- ✓ Use common sense and don't overdo—get help with loads that are too heavy or bulky to handle alone.
- ✓ Keep alert to hazards while you work.
- ✓ Follow all safety rules related to your job, and don't take any chances.
- ✓ Use proper lifting and carrying techniques.
- ✓ Take special care when handling hazardous materials—consult the MSDS for safety precautions, and report any spills or leaks immediately.

- ✓ Always wear appropriate PPE.
- ✓ Use materials-handling equipment as you've been trained to do—and don't exceed its load capacity.
- ✓ Keep an eye on what others around you are doing.
- ✓ Let other workers know what you're doing.
- ✓ Don't block aisles, passage-ways, or doorways, and make sure you have sufficient clearance when moving through these areas.

