

:: Preventing Back Injuries ::

Back injuries are one of the most common and costly workplace injuries. It is estimated that 80 percent of all Americans will suffer from back pain at some time in their lives. Yet preventing back injuries can be as simple as taking a few minutes to warm up, evaluating and properly performing job tasks and strengthening your back while away from work.

Since most back pain is mechanical, people have increased pain with particular motions of their backs. Most mechanical back pain is not caused by a slipped or ruptured disc, but can be aggravated by improper posture or body mechanics. Proper posture and body mechanics can help protect your body, especially your back, from pain and injury.

Back pain is usually the result of a number of contributory factors, and poor posture and faulty body mechanics are generally involved.

Back injuries can be painful, costly and take time to heal. Unfortunately, in many instances, once you have a back injury, you will be susceptible to those types of injuries for the rest of your life. So taking the time to protect your back is something you need to make a priority both on and off the job.

Here are some tips to help you lift safely and protect against back injuries:

Plan before you lift. Remove anything that is in the way. Pushing is easier than pulling. Pulling is easier than carrying. Lowering loads causes less strain than lifting.

Get help for heavy or bulky loads. Use equipment, like a cart, to help when possible.

Warm up your muscles with gentle stretches before you lift. This is very important if you have been sitting for more than 15 minutes before lifting.

Test the weight of the load first. Be sure that you can handle it safely. A big load of the same weight will put more strain on your body than a small load. Break your load into smaller or lighter loads.

Face the way you need to move. Avoid twisting or side bending. Turn your entire body. Place your feet wide apart to keep your balance.

Hold the load close to your body. Grip the load using your whole hand, not just the fingers. Using your whole hand will give you the greatest grip area and strength. Balance your load evenly between both arms.

Lift with as straight a back as is comfortable. Tighten your abdominal (stomach) muscles. Bend your legs so they do the lifting.

Keep the load between shoulder and knee height. Avoid reaching.

Change your position and stretch to relax and rest your tired muscles. You need time to recover your strength between lifts to be able to work safely. Repeated and long lifts are the most tiring. Switch between heavy loads and lighter ones.

Plan where to set the load down. Place loads on a raised platform. Leave enough room for your hands to grip the load. Avoid placing loads directly on the floor.

Rest more often when it is hot and humid.

Take more time to warm up your muscles when it is cold.

Take more breaks if you are also using tools and equipment that vibrate.