

:: Back Injuries ::

The back is one of the most important parts of the human body. It is also the most frequently injured part of the body. Eight out of 10 workers will suffer some form of a disabling back injury during their lifetime. Back injuries are the number one cause of employee absenteeism for workers under the age of 45, and workers who have suffered disabling back injury, are more likely to have reoccurrences.

The best way to prevent back injuries is to practice safe lifting procedures, such as:

- Use your legs to lift, not your back.
- Keep your feet apart.
- Keep your back slightly arched.
- Never twist your back to turn (use your whole body instead).
- Never shift the load while carrying it.

Before you begin, use a mental checklist to plan the best way of lifting, carrying or moving an object. Ask yourself:

- How much does the object weigh?
- Where will you grip the object?
- Where will you carry the object?
- How are you going to put the object down?

When lifting alone, remember to:

- Stand with your feet apart.
- Squat to pick up the object; don't bend at the waist.
- Keep the object close to your body.
- Straighten your knees to lift.

When lifting with someone:

- Stand close to the object.
- Stand with your feet apart.
- Squat to pick up the object; don't bend at the waist.
- Count to three together and then lift.
- Lift together by straightening your knees.

If you can't lift the object, push it instead:

- Stand close to the object, one foot back and one foot forward.
- Place your hands on the object at waist level.
- Push using your body weight or turn around so that your back is facing the object and push, using your legs, while keeping your back straight.

Physical condition:

- Keep yourself in good shape. Lack of proper exercise causes your back and stomach muscles to lose their strength and flexibility.
- Being overweight puts additional strain on your lower back. An extra 30 pounds of upper body weight can put an additional 300 pounds of stress on your lower back every time you bend at the waist.

Use good posture:

- Stand straight, shoulders and head back, stomach pulled in.
- Shift your weight from leg to leg when standing for long periods of time or place one foot on a stool.
- Keep your work surface at the proper height (waist level is usually the best).

When sitting:

- Make sure you maintain the natural curve of your spine.
- Keep your back supported against the chair or lumbar support.
- Keep your feet on the floor.
- Keep your knees slightly higher than your hips.

Back injuries can be prevented by using proper lifting/carrying methods and good posture, getting help with the lift, keeping yourself in good physical condition and planning the lift before you complete the task.

If you'd like further information on preventing back injuries, contact the Bureau of Workers' Compensation, Health & Safety Division at:

717-772-1635

