

Back Safety

Facts:

- **80% of Americans will have a back injury that requires medical attention**
- **Once you've injured your back you're 33% more likely to do it again**
- **Back injuries are the second most common cause of days away from work, next to the common cold**
- **80% of back injuries occur within the first 2 hours of a shift - due to stiffness**

Anytime you find yourself doing one of the following, you could injure your back

Heavy lifting... especially repetitive ***lifting*** over a long period of time.

Twisting at the waist while lifting ... using a shovel or moving objects from one location to another while the feet remain in one position for example.

Reaching and lifting ... over your head, ***across*** a desk or from the back of a truck.

Lifting or carrying objects that have an odd shape or are awkward ...carrying a computer.

Working with poor body posture or in uncomfortable positions ... tasks that require you to bend over for long periods of time... kneeling... gardening... sorting...packing.

Standing or sitting too long in one position ... Sitting can be very hard on the lower back.

Slips and falls ... It is possible to suffer serious back injury from slipping on wet floors or ice or the result of a trip and fall.

Avoid Lifting and Bending Whenever Possible

Place object off the floor. Whenever you know that you or someone else will be lifting an object later, put it down on a table or other ***elevated*** surface instead of on the floor. ***Lower / raise shelves.*** Store objects between knuckle and shoulder height. The heaviest objects should be stored at waist level.

Follow these steps when lifting:

1. Take a balanced stance with your feet about shoulder-width apart. (It is OK to put one foot behind the object and the other next to it.)
2. Squat down, but keep your heels off the floor (on the balls of your feet). Get as close as you can to the object.
3. Use your palms and not just your fingers to get a secure grip on the object. Make sure that this grip will hold and you will not have to switch your grip later.
4. Lift slowly (without jerking) using your leg, abdominal and buttock muscles while keeping the load as close as possible to you.
5. Once you are standing “do not twist” when you change directions. Point your feet in the direction you want to go and then turn your whole body. Do not twist with the object while you are walking.
6. To lower the load or place the object, use these same guidelines in reverse.

Five Ways to Ensure a Healthy Back

It is important to be aware of your body position at all times and to know your body's limitations. You must learn to recognize situations where your back is most at risk: lifting, reaching, bending, twisting, etc. Then you must take measures to avoid an injury.

“It’s up to you to make *good* choices and to work safe”.

Stretch first ... Take the time to stretch your muscles before starting if you know that you’re going to be doing anything that may be hard on your back.

Slow down ... Take it slow if you are doing a lot of heavy, repetitive lifting. Allow recovery time between lifts. **“Don’t overdo it”**

Rest your back ... Take “micro” (short) breaks frequently. Stretch after each lift. When you know that you will be working in an awkward position for a long time, plan on taking one minute stretch break every so often to avoid stiffness and soreness.

Get in shape ... Strengthen your stomach muscles, lose weight if you are overweight, and increase your flexibility. All of these things can help reduce the probability of a back injury.

Maintain correct posture ... maintain the back natural curves by standing straight and sitting properly.