

# How to Prevent Back Injuries

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than one million workers suffer back injuries each year, and back injuries account for one of every five workplace injuries or illnesses. Further, one-fourth of all compensation indemnity claims involve back injuries, costing employers billions of dollars. These figures do not begin to reflect the pain and suffering employees experience as a result of their injuries

## How to Prevent Back Injuries?

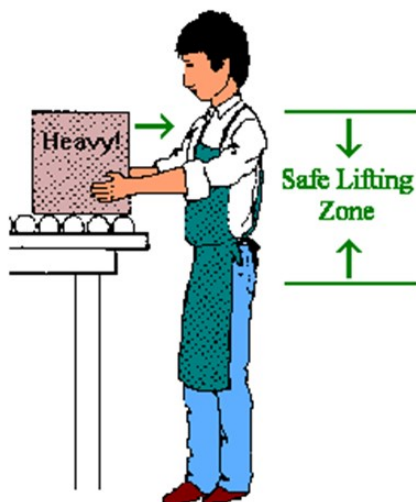
The best way to prevent back injuries is to develop habits that reduce the strain placed on the back. There are some basic things you can do to help.

### 1. Avoid Lifting and Bending Whenever You Can

Anytime you can spare your back the stress and strain of lifting and bending, do so! If you don't use your back like a lever, you avoid putting it under so much potentially damaging force.

**Place objects up off the floor.** If you can set something down on a table or other elevated surface instead of on the floor, do it so you won't have to reach down to pick it up again.

**Raise / lower shelves.** The best zone for lifting is between your shoulders and your waist. Put heavier objects on shelves at waist level, lighter objects on lower or higher shelves.



**Use carts and dolly's** to move objects, instead of carrying them yourself.

**Use cranes, hoists, lift tables, and other lift-assist devices whenever you can.**

### 2. Use Proper Lifting Procedures

You can't always avoid lifting, but there are ways to reduce the amount of pressure placed on the back when you do so. By bending the knees, you keep your spine in a better alignment, and you essentially take away the lever principle forces. Instead of using your back like a crane, you allow your legs to do the work.

- ◆ Take a balanced stance with your feet about a shoulder-width apart. One foot can be behind the object and the other next to it.



- ◆ Squat down to lift the object, but keep your heels off the floor. Get as close to the object as you can.

- ◆ Use your palms (not just your fingers) to get a secure grip on the load. Make sure you'll be able to maintain a hold on the object without switching your grip later.



- ◆ Lift gradually (without jerking) using your leg, abdominal and buttock muscles and keeping the load as close to you as possible. Keep your chin tucked in so as to keep a relatively straight back and neck line.

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**AVOID TWISTING**



- ◆ Once you're standing, change directions by pointing your feet in the direction you want to go and turning your whole body. Avoid twisting at your waist while carrying a load.

- ◆ When you put a load down, use these same guidelines in reverse.

## 3. Also follow these lifting tips:

- ◆ **Reduce the amount of weight lifted.** If you're moving a bunch of books, better to load several small boxes than one extremely heavy load.
- ◆ **Use handles and lifting straps.**
- ◆ **Get help** if the shape is too awkward or the object is too heavy for you to lift and move by yourself!

## Body Management

- ◆ It's important to know your body's limitations, and it's important to be aware of your body position at all times. Learn to recognize those situations where your back is most at risk: bending, lifting, reaching, twisting, etc. Then take measures to avoid an injury.
- ◆ **Stretch first** - If you know that you're going to be doing work that might be hard on your back, take the time to stretch your muscles before starting, just like a professional athlete would do before a workout. This will help you avoid painful strains and sprains.
- ◆ **Slow down** - If you're doing a lot of heavy, repetitive lifting, take it slowly if you can. Allow yourself more recovery time between lifts, as well. Don't overdo it.

- ◆ **Rest your back** - Take frequent, short (micro) breaks. Stretch. If you've ever been working in an awkward position for a long time, then stood up and felt stiff and sore, you know you've been in that position too long, and your body is now protesting. Taking a one minute stretch break every now and then can help you avoid that.
- ◆ **Sleep on a firm mattress.** - Also, the best sleeping position for many people is either on the back with the knees slightly elevated (by a pillow), or on the side with knees slightly bent
- ◆ **Get in shape** - Strengthen your stomach muscles, lose a little weight, increase your flexibility.

## Common Causes of Back Injuries

- ◆ Many back injuries cannot be attributed to a single causal factor; in other words, they tend to be the result of cumulative damage suffered over a long period of time. However, certain actions, motions, and movements are more likely to cause and contribute to back injuries than others.

Anytime you find yourself doing one of these things, you should think: **DANGER! My back is at risk!**

- ◆ Heavy Lifting
- ◆ Twisting at the waist while lifting or holding a heavy load
- ◆ Reaching and lifting
- ◆ Lifting or carrying objects with awkward or odd shapes
- ◆ Working in awkward, uncomfortable positions
- ◆ Sitting or standing too long in one position
- ◆ Slipping on a wet floor or ice

**NOTE:** Also, some people suffer back pain because they sleep in a bad position, or because their mattress is too soft or does not provide enough support.