

Protect yourself from back injuries

One minute you're moving a package from one room to another and the next minute...OUCH! Back injuries are among the most common workplace complaints. But with the right technique and attention to safety, injuries can often be avoided.



Before you lift that next load, take time to remind yourself of the right way to lift:

- 1. Get as close to the load as possible.** The further the load is from the center line of your body, the greater the strain on your back. It may help to squat down to lift the load and pull it between your legs. This gets it closer to the center of your body and prevents the need to bend at the waist. However, be on the lookout for signs of fatigue. Leg muscles are the largest muscles in your body, and they consume the most energy. Repeated squatting can be tiring, and it reduces your ability to lift in this manner for any length of time.
- 2. Avoid picking up heavy objects placed below your knees.** Make sure heavy objects are placed and stored above knee level and below shoulder level. If you suspect the load is too heavy to be lifted comfortably, do not chance it. Use a mechanical aid, break the load down into its component parts, or get help. The most common cause of back injury is overloading.
- 3. Keep your back straight.** Bend at the waist when reaching to lift an object. Keep the natural arch in your lower back, which distributes the load evenly over the surface of spinal disks, and is less stressful than if the disk is pinched between vertebrae. Bending principally from the hips is acceptable if you maintain the arch in your back, rather than bending at the waist.
- 4. Glue your hand to your thigh.** If you carry a load in one hand, such as when carrying a tool box, place your free hand on the outside of your thigh and mentally "glue" it into position. This will help you maintain correct back alignment rather than lifting and tilting to one side. When carrying a heavy load, side bending can be just as stressful to the spine as bending forward.
- 5. Tighten your stomach muscles.** This technique helps prevent your spine from twisting. If you lift a load and need to place it off to one side, turn by moving your feet. After repeated lifts you might find yourself getting a bit sloppy and forgetting to move your feet. You can overcome this tendency if the place you set the load down is at least one step away from where it is lifted. If you wear a back support belt, wear it low on your trunk and loosen it when you are not lifting.

Quick lifting tips:

- Store heavy objects above knee-level and below shoulder height
- Be sure to stretch before you attempt to lift anything
- Pay attention to signs of fatigue



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- 6. Stay in good physical condition.** A protruding stomach is an extra load carried away from the center line of the body, and prevents you from keeping a lifted object close-the number one rule for back care. When you bend at the waist to lift, due to the leverage principal, the load is up to 10 times heavier than its actual weight. The extra weight puts additional stress on the spine.
- 7. Stretch and loosen up before work.** Research has shown that trunk flexibility and mobility is significantly lower in the morning than later in the day, increasing the number and severity of back strains at this time. A few minutes of stretching can warm up cold stiff muscles and tendons and help you avoid an injury.