

Toolbox Talk

Lifting Techniques - Prevent Back Pain

Overview of topic

Although back problems are among the most common types of pain and disability, most of these problems are completely preventable through the use of proper lifting techniques.

There are a wide variety of injuries that can happen to the back. Some injuries are serious enough to require surgery. Some injuries lead to permanent disability. Any back injury can limit all of your activities, both on and off of the job. By using the correct lifting posture, you can avoid back injury.

The basic rules of good lifting are:

- Size up the load before you lift. Test by lifting one of the corners or pushing. If it's heavy or feels too clumsy, get a mechanical aid or help from another worker. When in doubt, don't lift alone.
- Bend the knees. Note that this item is the single, most important aspect of lifting.
- Place your feet close to the object and center yourself over the load.
- Get a good hand hold.
- Lift straight up, smoothly, and let your legs do the work, not your back.
- Do not twist or turn your body once you have made the lift.
- Make sure beforehand that you have a clear path to carry the load.
- Set the load down properly.
- Always push, not pull, the object when it's on a cart or dolly.
- If it's a long load, get some help.
- Split the load into several smaller ones when you can.

Discuss other factors that affect the back, including:

- Aging.
- Proper postures for sleeping, standing, and sitting. Sleep on your side with your knees bent or on your back. Sit with your knees slightly higher than your hips with your hips located near the rear of the chair. Stand with the shoulders back with the spine's "S curve" centered over the pelvis.
- Physical condition. Extra weight means extra strain on the back. Stress can also play a part in muscle spasms. It is important to take time to relax.
- Repetitive motion can contribute to back problems.

Employee training

OSHA has not developed any training requirements for proper lifting techniques.

Training tips

List the jobs or duties workers might perform at your company where lifting hazards exist.

You may want to go into your organization's policy on reporting back pain and your organization's treatment recommendations. If you have specific policy on back pain or injury, present it in detail to your employees.

If your organization has specific ergonomic practices or aids, explain and demonstrate their use.