

Safe Lifting Techniques

Toolbox Talk

Can you think of an occupation where you never have to lift? Lifting can be a large part of your job if you are a construction worker or an occasional task if you are an office worker. Because lifting is something everybody does at one time or another on the job or at home, you hardly ever think about it at all – at least not until your back begins to hurt.

Repeated incorrect lifting can result in a variety of injuries. Back strain is the most common type of injury and results from overstretching muscles. Damaged spinal disks, which health care professionals refer to as herniated disks, can be a serious, painful result of incorrect lifting. Using safe lifting techniques can help reduce the possibility of back injuries.

The goal of safe lifting is to maintain your back's natural posture during the lift. Your back forms three natural curves: one in the neck, the middle back, and the lower back. Maintaining these curves in your posture while lifting minimizes pressure on your discs and gives you maximum lifting strength.

No single lifting technique will apply to all situations, but the following tips will help avoid back injuries during any type of lift:

- **Size up the load** – look it over and decide whether you can handle it alone or if you need help.
- **Ask for help if you need it** – you'll avoid many injuries if someone can assist.
- **Inspect your intended path of travel** for obstacles or other possible hazards.
- **Get a firm footing** – place your feet shoulder-width apart and wear well-supporting work shoes.
- **Bend at your knees, not your waist.** Leg muscles are stronger and more durable than back muscles – let your leg muscles do the work.

- **Grip your load firmly** and use work gloves if necessary.
- **Keep the load close to your body.** For greater strength and stability, lift and carry the object near your waist.
- **Move your feet when you change directions;** do not twist your upper body while carrying your load.

Teamwork is essential for loads requiring two people. In addition to the tips outlined above you should also:

- Designate a leader in advance.
- Plan the lift.
- Lift and lower in unison and with no sudden moves.
- Communicate with your partner during the entire move.

Equally as important as using safe lifting techniques is maintaining your body in good physical condition. Poor posture, obesity, lack of exercise, and stress can all contribute to back injuries. To reduce your chance of back pain, educate yourself on how the back works and how to keep it healthy and flexible. Ask your healthcare provider to recommend stretching and conditioning exercises and practice them regularly.

Let's review the safety practices one more time:

- Size up the load.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Get a firm footing.
- Bend at your knees, not your waist.
- Get a good grip.
- Let the leg muscles do the work.
- Keep the load close.
- Never twist your body.

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Training Log

Company Name: _____

Name of Trainer: _____

Date of Training: _____

Employee Name (printed)	Employee Signature

Source: Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation and North Dakota State University Extension
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