

Toolbox Topics: Back Safety

The Hazard

Taking care of your back is vital to enjoying a healthy life. The challenge is that certain activities, practices and situations in the workplace and at home can cause immediate and long-term back problems. Back Safety describes precautions you can take to avoid these problems.

Causes and Effects

Back strain, sprain and sometimes dislocation are injuries that occur to the back due to poor posture and excess force applied to the backbone and muscles. This results in mild to severe pain, discomfort and in some cases long term disability.

Activities and actions that cause back pain and injuries are:

- Lifting of heavy objects
- Improper object lifting techniques
- Standing for prolonged periods
- Slips, trips and falls
- Assuming poor posture while sitting
- Dropping from a height and landing with both feet on a hard surface
- Sleeping on a mattress this is too soft

Risks for experiencing back problems are higher for persons working in physically demanding jobs.

Prevention

Avoid lifting heavy objects

- Get help or use mechanical aids

Use proper lifting techniques

- Keep the object close to the body
- Place feet apart
- Bend the knees
- Keep the back straight
- Turn by moving the feet and not the waist

Take periodic breaks when standing or sitting for prolonged periods.

Always keep the back straight and supported while sitting.

MORE TIPS FOR A HEALTHY BACK

Do

- Perform pre-shift stretching exercise to relax the back muscles.
- Inform your supervisor if you have any pre-existing musculoskeletal condition so as to be exempted from lifting objects.
- Assume proper lying position when sleeping.
- Eliminate slips, trips, and fall hazards at work and at home.

Don't

- Perform muscle stretches if you have existing muscle, ligament or tendon injuries.
- Jump down from a high step or truck cab. Step down slowly while holding to handgrips.
- Lift objects if you are in poor physical shape.
- Sleep on a mattress that is too soft.
- Pull a load when you can push it as less force is exerted on you back muscles when pushing a load than when pulling it.

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