

Safety Matters

Brought to you by



July 2008

Back Safety

Back injuries are considered by OSHA as the nation's #1 workplace safety problem. Back injuries are often very painful, a long term or lifetime disability, and are expensive to diagnose and treat. Most back problems are related to your spine. Your spine is made up of many small bones called vertebrae. These vertebrae are "spaced" by spinal disks that act as shock absorbers to cushion and separate your vertebrae.

Your spine serves not only to help you sit or stand upright, but also to protect your spinal cord. Your spinal cord is the main "information highway" for your entire body, and is composed of millions of nerves. Because your spine is a delicate structure, you will experience pain whenever you strain, sprain, or in some way injure your back.

Lifting Safely

In most work situations, objects that are very heavy are lifted and carried by machines such as forklifts. However, there are times when you may have to lift, adjust, or carry a heavy object. It is at these times that you run the risk of injuring your back.

Some causes of back pain are:

- Poor Posture
- Out of Shape
- Tension and Stress
- Aging and Disease
- Impact Trauma
- Repetitive Trauma

Assess the Situation - Before lifting and carrying a heavy object, take a few moments to assess the situation.

- How far will you have to carry the load?
- Is the way clear of clutter, cords, slippery areas, overhangs, stairs, curbs, or uneven surfaces?
- Will there be doors that are closed? Ask someone to hold a door open or place a wedge under the door to hold it open.
- Once you get the load up, will you be able to see over the load, or will the load block your view?
- Can the load be disassembled, carried in pieces, then reassembled?

Before You Lift - Take a few moments to "size up the load." Test the weight by lifting a corner of the object. If it is too heavy or if the object is an odd shape, STOP!

- Ask for help. Two or three people lifting a heavy object is much safer than trying to do it yourself.
- Use a handtruck, pushcart, or a mechanical lifting device.
- Consider using gloves that will improve your grip and protect your hands.
- Never lift anything unless you are sure you can do so safely.

Lifting the Load - The KEY to lifting safely is keeping your back straight or slightly arched. **NEVER USE YOUR BACK TO LIFT!**

- Start the lift by putting your feet close to the object. Get a firm footing.
- Center your body over your feet.
- Squat down like a professional weightlifter, bending your knees. Keep your back straight or slightly arched. You want your legs to do the lifting, not your back.
- Grasp the load securely with your hands, and pull the load close to you.
- Smoothly lift straight up. **NEVER TWIST YOUR BODY WHILE LIFTING, KEEPING YOUR HEAD UP, AS IF LOOKING STRAIGHT AHEAD, NOT DOWN.**

Setting the Load Down - Setting the load down is the reverse of lifting.

- Position yourself where you want to set the load.
- Squat down. Let your legs do the work, not your back.
- **REMEMBER NOT TO TWIST YOUR BODY WHILE SETTING DOWN A LOAD, AND KEEP YOUR HEAD UP.**
- Once the load is where you want it, release your grip. Never release your grip on a load until it is secure. You don't want to drop a load on your foot. Or, if someone is helping you, dropping a load unexpectedly can injure the other person.

Maintaining a Healthy Back

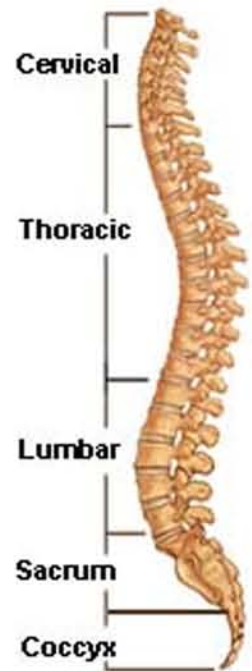
Posture: Standing - Stand up straight. Don't slouch. Use a footrest or anti-fatigue mats. Select and use appropriate footwear that is comfortable.

Posture: Sitting - Sit up straight. Again, don't slouch. Use a pillow or towel to support your lower back. Select and use a chair that fits you. When sitting, your knees should be slightly higher than your hips.

Posture: Lying Down - Select a mattress that doesn't sag. Sleep on your side with your knees bent or on your back. Avoid sleeping on your stomach with your head resting on a stack of pillows.

Exercise - Make time to exercise. Your back will benefit from many indoor and outdoor activities. Remember to maintain good posture throughout your exercise session. If you have a history of back or other health problems, check with your doctor before starting any strenuous exercise program.

Lateral (Side) Spinal Column



Spinal Vertebrae are spaced by spinal disks that act as shock absorbers to cushion and separate your vertebrae.

Carrying the Load - As you carry the load:

- Keep your back straight or slightly arched.
- Walk slowly and surely.
- Use your feet to change directions. Never twist your back.
- Avoid leaning over.
- Avoid lifting a load over your head.
- If you become tired, set the load down, and rest for a few moments.

Alternatives to Lifting - Handtrucks, Pushcarts, and Forklifts.

When using a handtruck or pushcart, remember:

- It is easier and safer to push than to pull.
- Stay close to the load, try not to lean over, and keep your back straight or slightly arched.
- Use both hands to control the handtruck or pushcart.
- Use tie-down straps, if necessary, to secure the load.
- Avoid stairs and inclines. If you must take a load to another floor, use a freight elevator.
- Never "horse around" with handtrucks and pushcarts.

If an object is too heavy to lift or carry with a handtruck or load onto a pushcart, use a forklift.

Remember... Safety Matters.

Comments and suggestions are always welcome and encouraged.



Email Jason at JTippett@nstargs.com