

Protecting Your Back

The facts about lifting and your back:

Back injuries tend to be one of the most expensive workers' compensation claims because:

- They can be very severe.
- They can be temporary or permanent.
- They may require surgery.
- A back injury claim can go on for a long period of time.

It is in your best interest to prevent these injuries before they occur!

Almost 8 in 10 people will suffer from back pain during their lifetime.

Causes of Back Pain:

- 20% from Inflammation
- 10% from Injury
- 70% from Degeneration

What do these numbers indicate?

Most back injuries could be prevented by protecting the back when lifting.

You do **not** have to be old to hurt your back. It can happen when you are seventeen or sixty-five. The damage can occur over a long period of time or suddenly. It may be due to lifting too much one time or lifting improperly for years causing slight damage to the back each time you lift.

Back injuries cause a lot of pain. If you injure your back, you may no longer be able to work, drive a car, walk, and do many of the other things that you take for granted.

What are common causes of back injuries at work?

- Injuries to the lumbar area (lower back) are the most serious and very common when handling materials incorrectly.
- Many jobs require Manual Material Handling*.

*Manual Material Handling is any carrying or holding activity of a load by one or several workers that includes the following actions: lift/lower, push/pull, twist carry or hold



Your employees are likely to injure their backs at work if they:

- Lift materials that are too heavy or unstable.
- Lift objects to or from places that are difficult to reach, such as over the head.
- Twist, bend, reach or lift repetitively.
- Fall.
- Trip over debris, boxes, trash, or something else.
- Carry items that are too heavy.
- Do physical work such as lifting without first "warming up."

Proper Lifting Procedure for Heavy Objects

1. Face the object. Place one foot behind the object and the other to the side.
2. Bend your knees to keep your back straight. Grasp the object firmly with both hands.
3. Check to see if it is too heavy for you to carry without help.
4. Carry the object close to your body. Keep your chin, elbows, and arms close to your body. Keep the weight of your body over your feet.
5. Lift using your legs, **not** your back.
6. Avoid any twisting motion.
7. Do the same in reverse when putting the object down.

How can you prevent back injuries on the job?

- Store materials at a level that limits lifting, reaching and twisting.
- Do not store materials in places that are difficult to reach.
- Deliver and store materials close to where you will use them.
- Require employees to separate large loads into smaller, lighter loads or to get help from a coworker.
- Use manual or mechanical lifting devices, such as a handcart, dolly, forklift, bobcat or a crane.
- Change the work set up, such as the angle or height of the work surface to reduce awkward positions or repetitive lifting.
- Make sure that aisles are clear to allow the use of material handling devices such as carts and dollies and to eliminate tripping hazards.
- **Train your employees to lift properly on a regular basis.** Always remind your employees to lift properly so that it is in the forefront of their minds.

Many employers have chosen to provide back belts to their employees to try to prevent back injuries. It is important to remember that research has not shown that back belts actually provide any protection for employees when lifting. In fact, some research suggests that back belts may increase the likelihood of back injuries. The research states the following:

- Employees wearing back belts may believe they cannot injure their back while wearing the safety device and may decide to lift objects that are much too heavy for them.
- Wearing a back belt too tightly and for long periods of time can increase the chance of injury when lifting without a back belt since the muscles of the back and stomach begin to lose strength due to lack of use.
- People who wear the belts have more injuries to the upper back.
- The belts can be dangerous to persons with high blood pressure. Improperly fitted belts can cause abdominal pain and injuries, especially if worn for extended periods of time.
- A belt cannot substitute for designing the work to minimize manual material handling. Instead of a belt, use the mechanical lift when possible.
- Proper lifting techniques are more important than wearing a back belt.

If you require your employees to wear back belts when lifting, or if they request them, please train them to use them properly to avoid these problems.

Back belts are designed to help a person maintain proper form while lifting. With that in mind, please remind your employees of the following:

1. Back belts should only be used when lifting.
2. Back belts should not be worn too tightly.
3. Back belts do not make you stronger!
4. Back belts do **nothing** to protect your back if you continue to lift improperly.
5. It is important to wear back belts only for lifting and to loosen or take them off when you are not lifting because back belts can cause any or all of the following problems:
 - Rubbing, pinching or bruising of the ribs.
 - Difficulty sitting and driving.
 - Excessive sweating.
 - A false sense of security.
 - Increased blood pressure and intra-abdominal pressure.
 - Weakened back and stomach muscles.
 - Abdominal hernia.