



Back Injury Prevention

Back injuries are one of the most common injuries in the workplace. Back injuries are typically caused by using improper lifting techniques and/or physical restrictions of the person doing the lifting. The following are some tips to help reduce the likelihood of a back injury.

- **Get as close to the load as possible.** The further the load is from the center line of your body, the greater the strain imposed on your back. If need be, squat down to lift the load and pull it between your legs. This gets the load closer to the center of your body and helps prevent the need to bend at the waist.
- **Avoid picking up heavy objects placed below your knees.** Try to see that heavy objects are placed and stored above knee level and below shoulder level. If you suspect the load is too heavy to be lifted comfortably, do not chance it and get help. The most common cause of back injury is overloading.
- **Keep your back straight.** This means do not bend at the waist when reaching to lift an object. Keep the natural arch in your lower back, which distributes the load evenly over the surface of spinal disks, and is less stressful than if the disk is pinched between vertebrae.
- **Glue your hand to your thigh.** If you carry a load in one hand, such as when carrying a tool box, place your free hand on the outside of your thigh and mentally "glue" it into position. This will help you maintain correct back alignment rather than lifting and tilting to one side. When carrying a heavy load, side bending can be just as stressful to the spine as bending forward.
- **Tighten your stomach muscles.** This technique helps prevent your spine from twisting. If you lift a load and need to place it off to one side, turn by moving your feet.
- **Stretch and loosen up before work.** Research has shown that trunk flexibility and mobility is significantly lower in the morning than later in the day, increasing the number and severity of back strains at this time. A few minutes of stretching throughout the day can warm up cold stiff muscles and tendons and help you avoid an injury.

