



# BACKS AND LIFTING

## INTRODUCTION

Back injuries that result from lifting materials are one of the most common injuries that happen in the workplace. While completely eliminating the risk of back injuries from the workplace is nearly impossible, there are ways employees can minimize their chances of suffering a work-related back injury. In this lesson are some guidelines that employees can use to help minimize their chances of a back injury occurring when lifting materials.

## COMMON BACK INJURIES ASSOCIATED WITH LIFTING

Common back injuries associated with lifting include:

- Sprains and strains
- Herniated disks
- Fractured vertebrae

## COMMON CAUSES OF BACK INJURIES

Some of the common causes of back injuries include:

- Lifting materials that are too heavy or unstable.
- Lifting objects to or from places that are awkward to reach.
- Repetitive motions such as twisting, bending, reaching overhead or lifting.
- Working for long periods in a bent over or strained position.
- Falling.
- Tripping over debris.
- Wearing tool belts that are too heavy.
- Lifting or doing any physical labor when you haven't warmed up your muscles.



## PROTECTING YOUR BACK

To aid in the protection of the back, employees should do the following when performing lifting tasks:

- Avoid lifting and bending whenever possible.
- Place objects where they are easy to access.
- Avoid placing objects on the floor when possible.
- When possible, use a dolly or forklift to lift objects instead of manual methods.
- If a manual lift must be performed, keep objects between your shoulder and waist.
- When possible, push an object rather than pull. Pulling puts more strain on the back muscles than pushing.
- Don't lift heavy loads. If you're straining under the weight of an object, then it is too heavy for you to lift alone.
- Make sure that you have enough room to lift safely before picking up an object.
- Know the destination of your load before picking it up.
- Avoid walking on slippery and uneven surfaces while carry objects.



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## PREVENTING BACK INJURIES

Employees should do the following to help prevent back injuries:

- Plan your move
  - Ensure that the path you are going to take is clear of wet surfaces, obstacles and obstructions, and that there are no slopes.
- Size up the load
  - Look at the location of the object. If the object is overhead or on the ground, think about how you can safely reach it or how to get into a comfortable position to reach it.
  - Test the weight of the object that you will pick up.
  - Test the object for shifting contents. Shifting contents can affect how the object will behave when lifted.
- Get help as needed
  - Perform a team lift if the size or weight of the object is too much for you handle. Lifting awkwardly-shaped or sized objects can be just as dangerous as lifting heavy objects when you do it alone.
- If you have the option, use a dolly or other piece of material handling equipment over manual lifting methods.



## LIFTING TECHNIQUE

When a manual lift must be performed, employees should use the following technique to minimize or eliminate the strain on the back:

- Get as close to the object as possible.
- Use a wide, balanced stance with one foot slightly ahead of the other with your heels on the floor.
- Bend your knees when lifting or lowering objects. This will help you keep the natural curve of your spine.
- Use your palms, not just your fingers, to grasp the load. It is recommended that you place your palms on opposite corners of the object.
- Keep your head up while lifting.
- Lift with a smooth, steady motion. Keep the object between your shoulders and waist area.
- Pivot to turn in the direction that you want to go. Do NOT twist.
- Slowly lower the load. Slow lowering will help maintain the curve of your lower back.
- When you have to get an object from above shoulder height, employees should lower the front portion so that it is below the shoulder.

## CONCLUSION

Back injuries are one of the most common types of injuries in the workplace. By following the guidelines presented in this lesson, employees can help minimize their chances of a back injury from occurring while lifting or lowering objects. Employees should remember to use team lifts or mechanical methods of lifting whenever possible over manual methods.