

Back Safety at Work

The best way to prevent back injuries is to develop habits that reduce the strain placed on the back. There are some basic things you can do to help

Avoid Lifting and Bending Whenever You Can

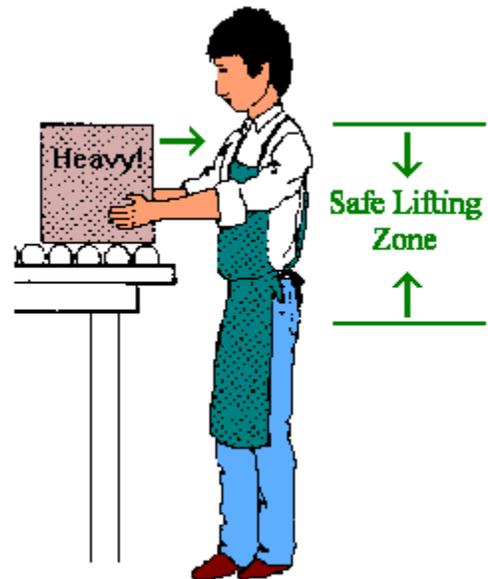
Anytime you can spare your back the stress and strain of lifting and bending, do so! If you don't use your back like a lever, you avoid putting it under so much potentially damaging force.

Place objects up off the floor. If you can set something down on a table or other elevated surface instead of on the floor, do it so you won't have to reach down to pick it up again.

Raise / lower shelves. The best zone for lifting is between your shoulders and your waist. Put heavier objects on shelves at waist level, lighter objects on lower or higher shelves.

Use carts and dollies to move objects, instead of carrying them yourself.

Use cranes, hoists, lift tables, and other lift-assist devices whenever you can.



Use Proper Lifting Procedures

You can't always avoid lifting, but there are ways to reduce the amount of pressure placed on the back when you do so. By bending the knees, you keep your spine in a better alignment, and you essentially take away the lever principle forces. Instead of using your back like a crane, you allow your legs to do the work.

Follow these steps when lifting:

1. Take a balanced stance with your feet about a shoulder-width apart. One foot can be behind the object and the other next to it.
2. Squat down to lift the object, but keep your heels off the floor. Get as close to the object as you can.



3. Use your palms (not just your fingers) to get a secure grip on the load. Make sure you'll be able to maintain a hold on the object without switching your grip later.

4. Lift gradually (without jerking) using your leg, abdominal and buttock muscles and keeping the load as close to you as possible. Keep your chin tucked in so as to keep a relatively straight back and neck line.

HUG THE LOAD



5. Once you're standing, change directions by pointing your feet in the direction you want to go and turning your whole body. Avoid twisting at your waist while carrying a load.

6. When you put a load down, use these same guidelines in reverse.

AVOID TWISTING



Also follow these lifting tips:

Reduce the amount of weight lifted. If you're moving a bunch of books, better to load several small boxes than one extremely heavy load.

Use handles and lifting straps.

Get help if the shape is too awkward or the object is too heavy for you to lift and move by yourself!

Body Management

It's important to know your body's limitations, and it's important to be aware of your body position at all times. Learn to recognize those situations where your back is most at risk: bending, lifting, reaching, twisting, etc. Then take measures to avoid an injury.

Stretch first - If you know that you're going to be doing work that might be hard on your back, take the time to stretch your muscles before starting, just like a professional athlete would do before a workout. This will help you avoid painful strains and sprains.

Slow down - If you're doing a lot of heavy, repetitive lifting, take it slowly if you can. Allow yourself more recovery time between lifts, as well. Don't overdo it.

Rest your back - Take frequent, short (micro) breaks. Stretch. If you've ever been working in an awkward position for a long time, then stood up and felt stiff and sore, you know you've been in that position too long, and your body is now protesting. Taking a one minute stretch break every now and then can help you avoid that.

Sleep on a firm mattress. - Also, the best sleeping position for many people is either on the back with the knees slightly elevated (by a pillow), or on the side with knees slightly bent.

Get in shape - Strengthen your stomach muscles, lose a little weight, increase your flexibility.

A poster titled "MY BACK SAFETY PRINCIPLES" with the subtitle "Use these principles to avoid a lifetime of Back Pain!". The poster features a central illustration of a human figure in a crouching position, carrying a box. The figure is labeled with the letters M, Y, B, A, C, K, corresponding to the principles listed. The principles are: M: Make sure you plan the lift. Clear the path. Assess if the load is too heavy. If the load is too heavy, seek assistance. Y: Your feet should be shoulder width apart. Get a firm footing close to the load. B: Be sure to lift smoothly using a suitable lifting technique. Avoid jerking or twisting. A: A suitable firm grip should be maintained throughout the lift. C: Carry the load close to your body, always move your feet when turning. K: Keep your spine aligned with natural curves. Maintain the 'S' shaped curve in your back. The poster also includes a logo for "Supreme Safety" and a small graphic of a person carrying a box. At the bottom, there is a small text box that reads: "Identify any hazards - Assess any risks to yourself & fellow workers - Take control and make changes to your work environment".