

Caring for your Spine

Proper Lifting Techniques

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Improper lifting techniques are responsible for a large percentage of back injuries among workers. Understanding proper lifting and handling techniques for heavy objects prevents back injury, and makes work easier. You need to "think" about what you are going to do before bending to pick up an object. Safe lifting technique should become a habit.

Proper lifting requires that the back be kept as straight as possible. Tucking the chin in helps maintain a straight spine. The majority of lifting should be performed with the legs. Always ask for assistance when presented with the task of lifting a heavy or awkward item. Whenever possible use assistive devices or mechanical equipment to lighten the load and improve the efficiency of movement.

The risk for back injury increases when an individual relies more on the back muscles than the leg muscles to perform the work. The risk for back injury also increases when: lifting an item that is heavy or awkward; twisting the body while carrying an object and when multiple people try to lift a heavy object without coordinating the activity.

The following list should be reviewed and respected before lifting any heavy objects.

The basics steps of safe lifting and handling.

1. Size up the load and check overall conditions. Don't attempt the lift by yourself if the load appears to be too heavy or awkward.
2. Check that there is enough space for movement, and that the footing is good. "Good housekeeping" ensures that you won't trip or stumble over an obstacle.
3. Maintain good balance. The feet should be approximately shoulder width apart. One foot should be placed alongside the object to be lifted with the other foot placed behind the object that is to be lifted.
4. Bend the knees and don't stoop. Keep the back straight, but not vertical. (There is a difference.) Tucking in the chin straightens the back.)
5. Grip the load with the palms of your hands and your fingers. The palm grip is much more secure. Tuck in the chin again to make certain your back is straight before starting to lift.
6. Use your body weight to start the load moving, then lift by pushing up with the legs. This makes full use of the strongest set of muscles.

7. Keep the arms and elbows close to the body while lifting.
8. Carry the load close to the body. Don't twist your body while carrying the load. To change direction, shift your foot position and turn your whole body.
9. Watch where you are going!
10. To lower the object, bend the knees. Don't stoop. To deposit the load on a bench or shelf, place it on the edge and push it into position. Make sure your hands and feet are clear when placing the load.

Ideally, workers should be of approximately the same size for team lifting. One individual needs to be responsible for control of the action and to ensure proper coordination. If one worker is too tall, lifts too soon, shifts the load, or lowers it improperly, the assisting individual may be injured.