

Back Health Maintenance & Safe Lifting Technique

Back Injury Facts:

- Considered the nation's most prevalent workplace safety and health problem
- 80-90% of Americans will have a back injury during their lifetime
- Painful and can have an effect on everything a person does
- Seldom result from a single event but from cumulative trauma over time
- May be prevented by employing proper lifting and material handling techniques, exercising regularly, eating properly and maintaining good posture



Back Function: The back functions by protecting the spinal cord, serving as the main structure of the body, providing a lever for lifting and supporting internal organs. The lower back incurs the greatest stress and is the most susceptible to injuries due to this stress.

Back Structure & Pain: The back is composed of vertebrae (bone), discs, nerves, muscles, ligaments and tendons. The majority of back pain is associated with muscle and ligament strains, which heal quickly. Fluid filled discs absorb compressive forces and naturally degenerate as we age. Improperly lifting and carrying objects may negatively impact discs.

Maintaining a Healthy Back:

- **Good posture** – reduces back, neck & shoulder strain; maintains the natural curves of the spine
- **Learning to relax** – reduces stress and muscular tension
- **Eating a balanced diet** – keeps weight under control; helps to maintain the back's natural curves
- **Smoking** – negatively impacts the back by reducing the amount of oxygen and nutrients available to spinal discs and the healing process
- **Regular exercise** – strengthens and improves the flexibility of the back and abdominal muscles, lessens the severity of back injuries and promotes the healing process

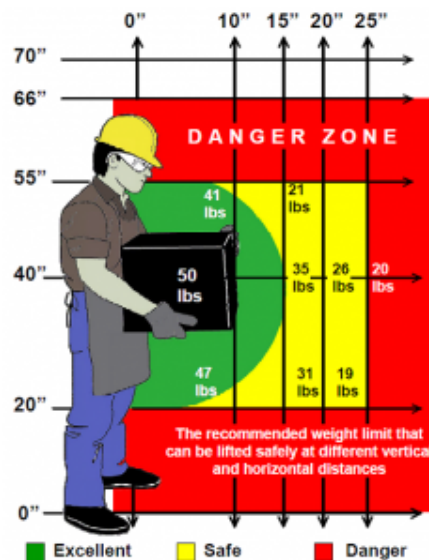


Material Handling Guidelines:

Before lifting an object, consider its weight, size and shape. Also, consider the frequency of the lift, the vertical distance of the lift and the horizontal distance between the person and the object. With heavy or awkward objects, you may need to ask for assistance from a coworker or use a material handling device, such as a hand truck, dolly, cart, pallet jack or forklift. Other options may include repackaging a load into smaller, more manageable units to facilitate safe lifting. Regardless of an object's weight, always use proper lifting technique.

Proper Lifting Technique:

- Plan the lift, including the route, any obstacles, doors and/or stairs
- Estimate the weight of the object to be lifted by tilting the corner
- Spread your feet apart to the approximate width of your shoulders
- Bend your knees
- Tighten your stomach muscles
- Keep your head up and your chin out
- Securely grip the load
- Keep the load close to your body
- Lift slowly and evenly, avoiding rapid, jerky motions
- Avoid simultaneously lifting and twisting
- Turn your feet in the direction of intended travel; don't twist at the waist



Combatting other Sources of Back Stress:

- **Prolonged sitting** – Using good posture; frequently changing position; taking regular walk breaks
- **Prolonged standing** – Using good posture; wearing soft-soled shoes; using foot supports; not standing with one's legs in a locked position
- **Slips, trips and falls** – Avoiding distractions (e.g., texting); being vigilant and reporting concerns; maintaining proper housekeeping; keeping aiseways clear of materials and equipment