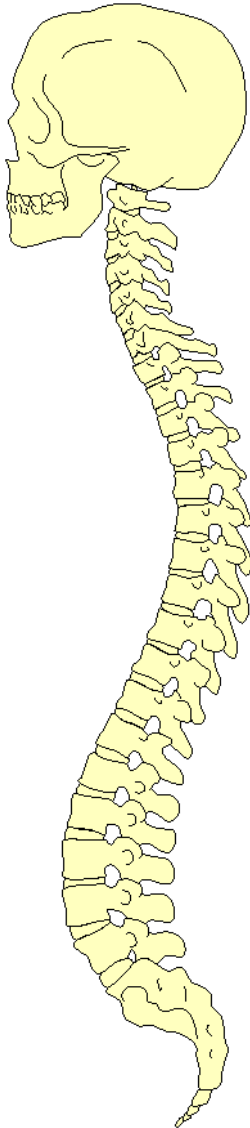


Monthly Safety Tip

Back Care

Our backs are particularly prone to strain or other injury. This is the price we pay for the ability to walk upright unlike most animals that walk on all fours. Having our bodies in a vertical alignment puts inherent strain on our backs even before we engage in any physical activity. When used properly, the back is one of the stronger areas of the body.

How do we utilize the strength of our back without risking injury due to the inherent weakness? There are a number of things we can do. Here are a few helpful hints.



- Stretch before you workout or engage in physical activity.
- Warm up your muscles before physical activity. If your job or other activity requires physical exertion, a few minutes taken warming up may be very helpful.
- Do some toning and strengthening exercises for your back and stomach on a regular basis. A stronger abdomen helps support your back and relieves some of the natural strain on the back.
- Lose excess weight. A potbelly causes the back to alter its natural “S” curve to compensate for the weight in front of the body.
- Maintain good posture whether sitting or standing.
- Plan ahead when lifting objects. Know how heavy the object is, the condition of the container, where you are taking it, and that the route is clear.
- Get help if you need it. Everybody has different limits. If what you are lifting is too heavy for you, get some help. You can divide the load into smaller loads, use a mechanical device, or ask someone for help. Carts, hand trucks, dollies, and hoists are all available to help you lift. If you think of an easier, safer way to lift something, tell your supervisor so others can benefit from your idea.
- Maintain good general health and fitness. A good diet and adequate rest will help reduce your risk.
- Stay alert to your surroundings. A simple slip or fall can result in a serious and painful back injury. Pay special attention anytime you are in unfamiliar areas. Watch for papers, moisture, drips, or other slipping hazards.
- Wear proper footwear for your work environment or activity. This will go a long way toward slip prevention.
- When using stairways, go slow, be extra observant, and always use the handrails.
- Sleep on your side or on your back with a pillow under your knees.
- Always use proper lifting technique.

Proper lifting technique begins before you even start to lift the object. As stated above, plan ahead. Start by sizing up the load. How heavy is it? How is it balanced? Is the container in good condition? Is it stable and secure or likely to shift during transfer?

Where will it be placed? Will I have to lift it higher to place it on a shelf? Is my route to the location clear of hazard or obstruction? Will I need help? Is a mechanical device available? These are just some of the questions you may want to consider before lifting the object.



When you lift the object, squat down if necessary, close to the item. Grasp



the item firmly. Keep your back straight and look forward. Lift smoothly using the power of your legs. Don't jerk the item up to lift it. When you are standing erect, turn by moving your feet, not by twisting your back. Set the object down carefully, again using your legs and keeping your back straight. Never twist and bend to lift. This is the easiest way to cause an injury.

If you do have a back injury at work, stop what you are doing immediately and report it to your supervisor. A doctor should evaluate all but very minor strains. Treatment for strains may include rest, ice, medication, or physical therapy. Prevention is the best way to reduce necessary treatment.

In general, stay fit and alert. Avoid those situations that may place you at increased risk for back injury. Consult your doctor before engaging in any physical conditioning program.

These guidelines should help reduce your risk of having a back injury.