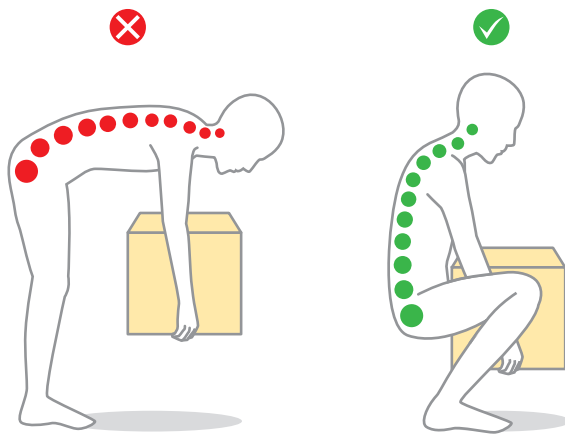


Quick Safety Tips: Preventing Back Injuries



Back injuries are the second most common cause of days away from work. A lot of workplace incidents can be prevented if you stay alert, know your risks and follow simple safety rules. Below we review main causes for back pain and provide simple steps to prevent back injuries whether you are sitting at a desk or performing physical activities.

A number of factors can contribute to back pain at work, from **lifting** heavy objects, **repetition** involving twisting and rotating your spine, to **inactivity** due to sitting for prolonged lengths of time, especially if you have poor posture sitting in your chair.

Manual Lifting Process:

Instead of attempting to carry or lift something that is heavy to save some time during your workday, take an extra minute to use available lifting equipment like a dolly, wheelbarrow, cart or forklift. Too many injury risks are involved with trying to lift something that weighs too much. Think Twice - Lift Once. Do not carry loads which obstruct your view, are too heavy or without a prepared/cleared place to put them down.

1. **Plan your route:** Do you have a clear path? Trip hazards removed?
2. **Assess the load:** Too heavy? Should I use a cart, dolly or forklift?
3. **Lift it correctly:** Position your body close to the object. Keep your back straight. Bend at the knees.
4. **Move it right:** Do not twist your back.
5. **Lower it right:** When you put the load down, bend your knees NOT your waist.

Repetition: Some tasks involve repeating the same actions with little variation. Highly repetitive tasks often involve the use of only a few muscles or body parts while the rest of the body is unaffected. When motions are repeated frequently, there may be inadequate time for muscles and tendons to recover, causing them to become strained and fatigued.

Activities that require repetitive motion include moving items from a low box to a high shelf or picking up items from the floor. The repetition of certain movements and having a slouching posture for too long are both causes of muscle fatigue and injury.

To prevent back injuries due to repetitive tasks, you should modify them as much as you can:

- Use lifting devices, when available, to help you lift loads.
- Try to alternate physically demanding tasks with less demanding ones.
- If you work at a computer, make sure that your monitor, keyboard, mouse and chair are positioned properly.
- If you frequently talk on the phone and type or write at the same time, place your phone on speaker or use a headset.
- Avoid unnecessary bending, twisting and reaching.
- Limit the time you spend carrying heavy items.
- Do mild stretching exercises prior to performing work and take short breaks to stretch and re-adjust your back.
- Avoid sudden sharp movements that can pull the back muscles

Inactivity: sitting down for extended periods of time, especially if the posture is incorrect, can cause back pain. Follow easy steps below to avoid back pain due to inactivity:

- Get up from your desk every 30 minutes: stand, walk or stretch
- Be active while not at work, exercise at least 60 minutes a day to combat the effects of sitting
- Do back stretching exercises regularly
- Keep good posture.

Remember: Always listen to your body, if it does not feel right, it is usually a good indicator that something is not right, your body knows what it can and cannot do. Know your limits and ask for help where needed. Safety is your main priority at work. Be aware of your risks and your surroundings to be able to perform every aspect of your job safely.