

## **Back Injuries Can Be a Pain!**

Statistics tell us that 8 out of 10 people experience back problems at some time during their lives. Back injuries affect millions of American workers every year and cost employers billions.

Overexertion is a leading cause of lost-time injuries. Overexertion occurs when a load being lifted, shifted, carried, pushed, or pulled exceeds the body's limits. The result can be tearing or stretching of muscles, tendons, and ligaments.

Overtaxing muscles frequently or for extended periods can cause them to become fatigued and prone to injury. Activities that increase muscle fatigue include:

- Force being exerted during a task
- Repetition of a task
- Awkward body posture during a task

The back—especially the lower back—is the area of the body most often damaged by overexertion. And once you injure your back, you are more likely to suffer re-injury, which leads to more pain and suffering.

### **Prevention Is the Cure**

Preventing back injuries is much easier than repairing them. Here are five fundamentals that can help you protect your back and prevent back injuries:

**1. Good Posture** – Whether your job involves a lot of sitting or hours of standing, maintaining a good neutral posture (the natural "S" shape of the spine) throughout the workday puts less strain on the back and decreases the risk of injury.

To avoid back strain while sitting, you should:

- Sit straight, with back resting against the back of the chair
- Placing feet flat on the floor or on a footrest
- Adjusting the chair so that knees are slightly higher than hips

To avoid back strain while standing, you should:

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart and weight balanced
- Ears, shoulders, and hips aligned
- Place one foot on a footrest and then alternate feet every five minutes—this will help maintain good posture while standing

*When we share the responsibility for safety in the workplace, everyone wins!!*

**2. Safe Lifting** – Improper lifting is probably the most common cause of workplace back injuries. Here are some safe body mechanics for lifting:

- Face the load with feet shoulder width apart
- Keep heels down and toes pointed slightly out
- Squat by bending at the hips
- Use leg and stomach muscles to power the lift
- Maintain the backs natural curves while lifting by keeping the head up



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**3. Micro Breaks** – Take frequent micro breaks of 10 to 20 seconds to arch your back and stretch tired, tense muscles. Whether exerting, sitting, or standing for long periods, micro breaks increase blood flow and decrease the risk of back injury.

**4. Healthy Weight** – Excess weight, especially in the stomach area, puts lots of extra stress on back muscles. Just by losing a few pounds, you can substantially reduce your risk of back injuries.

**5. Exercise** – Exercise and keep fit. Exercise improves overall wellness, and is particularly important for reducing back injuries. Strong, well-toned back and stomach muscles allow the back to work hard without injury.

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