TAKE 5

Lifting Safety

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Can you think of an occupation where you never have to lift? Lifting can be a large part of your job if you are a construction worker or an occasional task if you are an office employee. Since lifting is something everybody does at one time or another on the job or at home, you hardly ever think about it — at least not until your back begins to hurt. Using safe lifting techniques can help reduce the possibility of back injuries.

The goal of safe lifting is to maintain your back's natural posture during the lift. Use your legs to do most of the lifting and bend from your hips to minimize stress on your back. This technique gives you maximum lifting strength.

Lifting Techniques

No single lifting technique applies to all situations, but the following tips will help you avoid back injuries.

- Size up the load. Look it over and decide whether you can handle it alone or if you need help.
- Use simple material handling aids such as hand trucks and dollies for occasional material shifts.
- Consider obtaining material handling aids such as hoists, lift tables, non-powered or powered pallet jacks, or forklifts for frequent material shifts.
- Ask for help if you need it. You'll avoid many injuries if someone can assist.
- Inspect your intended path of travel for obstacles or other possible hazards.
- Get a firm footing. Place your feet a shoulder's width apart and wear work shoes with support.
- Bend at your knees, not your waist. Leg muscles are stronger and more durable than back muscles. Let your leg muscles do the work.

Lifting Techniques

- Grip your load firmly. Use work gloves if necessary.
- Keep the load close to your body. Lift and carry the object near your waist for greater strength and stability.
- Move your feet when you change directions. Do not twist your upper body while carrying your load.
- Teamwork is essential for loads requiring two people. In addition to the tips outlined above, you should also:
    - designate a leader in advance;
    - plan the lift;
    - lift and lower in unison;
    - avoid sudden moves; and
    - communicate with your partner during the move.

Getting regular exercise and maintaining physical fitness is equally vital. Poor posture, obesity, lack of exercise, and stress can contribute to back injuries. Educate yourself on how to keep the back healthy and flexible to reduce your chance of back pain. Ask your health care provider to recommend stretching and conditioning exercises and practice them regularly. Always use safe lifting techniques on every lift. Remember to practice safety. Do not learn it by accident.

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