

LIFTING: A DAILY ROUTINE

Whether at work or conducting daily activities at home, the potential exists for injuries to occur as a result of lifting. Lifting principles applied before, during and after working hours should lower the risk of back strains and sprains, the most common ailments that humans experience.

How big is the problem?

According to the National Safety Council, 60-80% of all workers will experience a back problem at some time during their working careers. Back strains and sprains are the largest source of workplace claims. Conditions in the workplace which, increase the likelihood of back pain, are called risk factors. Back pain risk factors associated with lifting include:

1. Lifting heavy loads;
2. Carrying bulky loads or loads far away from the body;
3. Frequent lifting;
4. Bending the body's trunk, as when picking items up off the floor;
5. Twisting the body's trunk;
6. Static loading (for example, holding objects for long periods of time).

If exposure to these risk factors is reduced or eliminated, the chance of experiencing back pain is reduced:

1. Limiting exposure by providing mechanical assistance, such as conveyor systems, two- and four-wheel carts, and hoists; or by lightening the load to be lifted;
2. Engineering means, such as elevating the starting point of the lift, to reduce worker exposure to awkward postures;
3. Training (a safer way to lift should be considered when none of the aforementioned methods are feasible);
4. Administrative controls (if the lifting is frequent, rotate the work with other workers).

Lifting techniques

If lifting is required, select the safest way to lift - one that is free from the potential for injury. However, lessen exposure by using an approach that encompasses best practices that have come about through research and application.

Here are some guidelines:

- Plan the lift from start to destination;
- Flex to loosen up your body before starting the lift;
- Squat close to the load;
- Grip the load firmly with both hands, not just the fingers;
- Place hands on diagonally opposite corners so one hand pulls toward you and the other one lifts;
- Bring the load as close as possible to the body;
- Keep weight centered over your feet, with arms and elbows against your sides;
- Keep your back straight, use the power in your legs to push yourself and the object into a standing position;
- Avoid twisting by changing direction with your feet;
- Continue to your destination with the object as close to the body as possible.