Avoiding Back Injury At Work



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Back injury at work claims are one of the most common claims seen. According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) over a third of claims reported to them where an employee took over 3 days, or more, off work was due to manual handling. The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 are designed to protect employees who are involved in manual handling and covers lowering, pulling, pushing as well as the more obvious lifting of objects.

Back pain is one of the most common reasons for missed work; 80 percent of the general population will suffer from a severe episode of lower back pain at least once in their lifetime. It's one of the most common workplace injuries and costs the US $100 billion every year. Cross the pond to the UK and a staggering 3,204,000 working days were lost to back disorders in Great Britain in 2016/17. It's a global problem.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

CAUSES OF BACK PAIN

Whether it's dull and achy or sharp and stabbing, back pain can make it hard to concentrate on your job. Unfortunately, many occupations — such as nursing, construction and factory work — can place significant demands on your back. Even routine office work can cause or worsen back pain. Understand what causes back pain at work and what you can do to prevent it.

A number of factors can contribute to back pain at work. For example:

- Exerting too much force on your back — such as by lifting or moving heavy objects — can cause injury.
- Repeating certain movements, especially those that involve twisting or rotating your spine, can injure your back.
- An inactive job or a desk job can contribute to back pain, especially if you have poor posture or sit all day in a chair with inadequate back support.

JOB DUTIES CONTRIBUTE TO BACK INJURIES

The majority of back injury claims are from repetitive job duties, such as:

- Pushing
- Pulling
- Poor posture
- Heavy lifting
- Twisting
- Over-extension of the extremities or spine

Heavy lifting traumas top the list of the most commonly received on the job injury with thousands of worker's compensation claims filed yearly. This is partially due to the lack of federal regulations regarding requirements for lifting in the workplace. Without these guidelines, employers must craft their own policies and safety measures to prevent these painful conditions from happening.

OTHER CAUSES

More than half of the workers who experience low back pain spend the majority of their work day sitting down. In fact, if you work in the construction sector, you're more likely to be hit by a vehicle or a falling brick than you are to suffer a back injury.

Back pain for seated employees can occur in many ways. The most common cause is lower back pain as a result of prolonged sitting in an uncomfortable position. The natural curve of the spine isn't supported and as such, aches and pains begin to occur.

Another cause of workplace back injury is through manual handling. This can range from injuries sustained when lifting heavy objects to bending unsafely to pick up pieces of paper on the floor.

For some people, back pain is intermittent and can be managed. They only need to adjust their chair and they start to feel better. Over time and with some exercise, back pain can go away on its own. However, this is not the case for everyone.

Lingering Effects

The amount of time people take off due to back pain hits businesses hard. This is especially true for small businesses that don't have the resources to maintain a proper level of service if people are off regularly, or off long term with some sort of back-related injury.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

TRIFECTA

Exercise/Diet/Weight

In order to achieve good physical health and fitness you need to fellow the TRIFECTA effect.

Exercise

- Exercise regularly. Activities such as walking, swimming and other low impact aerobic exercises are helpful for overall conditioning. Specific exercises to strengthen the back and abdominal muscles can also ward off back injuries.
- Combine aerobic exercise, such as swimming or walking, with exercises that strengthen and stretch your back muscles and abdomen. Exercises that increase your balance and strength can also decrease your risk of falling and injuring your back. Consider tai chi, yoga and weight-bearing exercises that challenge your balance.
- For most healthy adults, the Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity – preferably spread throughout the week – and strength training exercises at least twice a week.

Diet

- Start by eating a healthy diet. Make sure you get enough calcium and vitamin D. These nutrients can help prevent osteoporosis, a condition that causes your bones to become weak and brittle and is responsible for many of the bone fractures that lead to back pain.
- Keep your weight at a healthy level. Excess weight puts a strain on your back.

Weight

- Keep your weight at a healthy level. Excess weight puts a strain on your back.
- If you smoke, quit. Smoking reduces blood flow to your lower spine, which can contribute to spinal disc degeneration and slow healing from back injuries. Coughing associated with smoking can also cause back pain.

Other AIDS

- Maintain good posture. In particular, avoid standing or sitting in a “sway back” position. Pull in your abdomen and buttocks, and stand up straight.
- When doing work that requires standing for a long time, place one foot on a footrest and change your position from time to time.
- Fatigue can contribute to back injuries. Pay attention to how you feel and take rest breaks when you get tired.

Techniques for Proper Lifting

- Take a look at the object to be lifted. Is it heavy or awkward to lift?
- Plan your lift. Decide how to pick up the object, how you will carry it and where you will set it down.
- If the load is too heavy or awkward to lift safely, get help.
- To pick it up, get as close to the item as possible. Squat down in front of it.
- Lift the load by bending your knees and keeping your back straight. Let your legs – not your back – bear the weight.
- Use equipment available to lift and move materials. Hoists, lifts, turntables, handcarts and other devices can be effective back-savers.

FINAL WORD

Back problems can be caused by accumulated small injuries. Take good care of your back at all times to help prevent painful and disabling injuries.