Back Pain & Muscle Ache Safety Talks



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Back pain is one of the most common health complaints in the United States and around the world. Back pain affects 8 out of 10 people at some point in their lives. Risks are higher for manufacturing, warehouse, hospitality and trades workers, as well as others with physically demanding jobs.

Back pain is often times not the result of a single event. It is generally the result of multiple stressors on the body from improperly standing, sitting or lifting for a long time. Then suddenly, one simple movement such as bending to pick up the paper in the morning can cause pain.

Signs and symptoms of back pain can include:

- Muscle ache
- Shooting or stabbing pain
- Pain that radiates down your leg
- Pain that worsens with bending, lifting, standing or walking
- Pain that improves with reclining

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

There are many risk factors for back pain, including aging, genetics, occupational hazards, lifestyle, weight, posture, pregnancy and smoking. With that said, back pain is so prevalent that it can strike even if you have no risk factors at all.

Specific Risk Factors for Back Pain

Patients with one or more of the following factors may be at risk for back pain:

Aging. Over time, wear and tear on the spine that may result in conditions (e.g., disc degeneration, spinal stenosis) that produce neck and back pain. This means that people over age 30 or 40 are more at risk for back pain than younger individuals. People age 30 to 60 are more likely to have disc-related disorders, while people over age 60 are more likely to have pain related to osteoarthritis.

Genetics. There is some evidence that certain types of spinal disorders have a genetic component. For example, degenerative disc disease seems to have an

inherited component.

Occupational hazards. Any job that requires repetitive bending and lifting has a high incidence of back injury (e.g., construction worker, nurse). Jobs that require long hours of standing without a break (e.g., barber) or sitting in a chair (e.g., software developer) that does not support the back well also puts the person at greater risk.

Sedentary lifestyle. Lack of regular exercise increases risks for occurrence of lower back pain, and increases the likely severity of the pain.

Excess weight. Being overweight increases stress on the lower back, as well as other joints (e.g. knees) and is a risk factor for certain types of back pain symptoms.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Safe lifting procedures and load-carrying techniques are crucial to preventing painful and expensive injuries in the workplace. Unfortunately, most workers do not consistently use back safety practices, at great risk to their personal well-being. Back injuries are often caused by unsafe lifting and carrying of heavy or awkward objects, but are easily prevented. The most common types of job-related back injuries are:

- Strain—overused or overstretched muscles
- Sprain—torn ligaments from sudden movement
- Herniated disk—loss of the spine’s cushioning ability from strain or age

A back-safety program is key to dramatically reducing debilitating back injuries on the job.

Although improper lifting, carrying, and moving techniques are the primary cause of back injuries, significant contributing factors are workers who are in poor physical condition and overweight. Encourage your employees to maintain a healthy weight and good muscle tone through stretching exercises and other wellness programs.

You can take steps to avoid and prevent back pain and injuries at work. For example:

Pay attention to posture. When standing, balance your weight evenly on your feet. Don’t slouch. To promote good posture when sitting, choose a chair that supports your spinal curves. Adjust the height of your chair so that your feet rest flat on the floor or on a footrest and your thighs are parallel to the floor. Remove your wallet or cellphone from your back pocket when sitting to prevent putting extra pressure on your buttocks or lower back.

Lift properly. When lifting and carrying a heavy object, lift with your legs and tighten your core muscles. Hold the object close to your body. Maintain the natural curve of your back. Don’t twist when lifting. If an object is too heavy to lift safely, ask someone to help you.

Modify repetitive tasks. 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 briefcases, purses and bags.

Listen to your body. If you must sit for a prolonged period, change your position often. Periodically walk around and gently stretch your muscles to relieve tension.

Back pain can plague your workdays and free time. You’re not stuck with it, though. Examine your work environment and address situations that might aggravate your back. Even simple steps to ease back pain are steps in the right direction.

FINAL WORD

It is important to understand the complex bone and ligament structure if the back in the design and operation of workplace culture.