Prevent Back Injuries



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WHAT'S AT STAKE
Back injuries are a leading cause of lost time from work. They can occur in any type of job or workplace. They are not confined to jobs involving manual labor and heavy lifting.

WHAT'S THE DANGER
To some degree, deterioration of the back is a natural part of aging. Damage to the back often occurs gradually, with slight injuries accumulating until they cause discomfort.

EXAMPLE
Twisting your back while carrying a box of printer paper or manually unloading a pallet can contribute to back injury.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF
It is important to maintain good physical health and fitness to help prevent back injuries:

- 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.
- Keep your weight at a healthy level. Excess weight puts a strain on your back.
- 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.

These techniques are suggested for lifting safely to prevent back injuries:

- 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.