

April 2005 Safety Meeting

Protect Your Back

Meeting Purpose

To discuss the importance of protecting the health of your back. During this meeting we want to identify various types of back injuries, why back pain happens and discuss the importance of practicing good lifting habits. Most back injuries can be prevented by practicing just a few simple techniques. Remember, sometimes it is too late to get it right the second time with respect to a back injury!

Along with the common cold, problems with the lower back are a frequent cause of lost work time injuries and worker's compensation claims. Everybody loses when you're injured, your company, your customers and most importantly you and your family. If you're lucky, your back injury will quickly and completely heal, but oftentimes a back injury stays with you for a lifetime.

Types of Back Injuries

Sprains and strains are the most common causes of lower back pain. Ruptured or slipped disks are not uncommon with severe back injuries. They occur when the disk (vertebral cushion) presses on a nerve. Chronic tension or stress can result in frequent muscle spasms and aggravate back pain. Remember also that 'back pain' can result from problems with your internal organs such as kidneys, prostate gland and serious diseases. Don't fall into the trap of blaming all back pain on a back injury-it might not be! However, your back can be injured by improper lifting of even light loads. Did you know that lifting light loads improperly is the largest single cause of back pain and injury?

Why Back Pain Happens

Using improper lifting techniques can lead to back injuries, but other factors can contribute to this age-old problem. These problems include:

Poor Posture

Whether you're standing, sitting, or reclining, posture affects the amount of strain put on your back. The wrong posture increases strain on the back muscles and may bend the spine into positions that will cause trouble. Stand straight with your shoulders back and the "S" curve of your back directly over your pelvis.

Sit with your knees slightly higher than your hips. Your hips should be to the rear of the chair with your lower back not overly arched. Do not slouch or round your shoulders. Sleep on your side with knees bent or sleep on your back. Most experts encourage people to not sleep on their stomach. People that sleep on their sides should bend their knees slightly in a 'fetal position'. Consult your healthcare professional for specific help on sleeping.

Physical Condition

Your physical condition can lead to back pain. Overweight individuals place an additional strain on their back. One estimate states that every extra pound in the abdomen area places 10 pounds of extra strain on your back!

People who are out of shape also dramatically increase their chances for back injuries and pain. Eat properly and begin a routine of regular exercise. Consult your physician before starting any diet or exercise routine.

Stress is another factor that may lead to back pain. Stress can cause muscle spasms that affect your various nerve networks. Although stress is part of everyone's life, and a certain amount of stress is normal, excessive stress can cause backache. Balance your lifestyle and reduce activities that promote excessive stress.

Practice Good Lifting Techniques

Whenever possible, always enlist the aid of a mechanical device such as a hoist, conveyor, lift-gate or two-wheeler to lift and transport a load. However, sometimes it is necessary to load or unload by hand. When you do have to lift by hand, practice the following techniques:

- 1 Size up the load. Test the weight of the object before lifting. If it's too heavy, get help or use a mechanical lifting aid.
- 2 Bend the knees. Keep close to the object you're lifting, bend your knees and lift straight and smoothly. Allow your legs to lift the load, not your back.
- 3 Don't twist while lifting. If you must reposition your body, turn your entire body, don't twist your back!
- 4 Clear your path of travel. Ensure your travel path is clear of hazards and obstacles. Spilled oil or grease can cause you to lose your footing. Additionally, trash and debris can cause you to stumble.
- 5 Set the load down properly. When it's time to lower the load again, bend at the knees, letting your legs do the work. Keep your back as straight as possible.
- 6 Push, don't pull! When moving an object on the floor, typically it's better to push the load, not pull it. Pushing puts less load and strain on the back. Minimize any pulling or pushing of objects as much as possible. Use mechanical aids!

Plan Ahead

Planning ahead makes sense. Size up your lifting needs and determine if additional manpower or mechanical aids are needed. Long or oddly sized objects can cause problems with balance or negotiating through hallways or doorways. Use two people for these jobs. Without planning ahead, you might get yourself into trouble and injure your back and destroy valuable property. When in doubt, get extra help!

When a Serious Back Injury Occurs

If you sustain a minor back injury, simple care and bed rest will probably allow the pain to go away in a brief period of time. If it doesn't, or it is accompanied by weakness or numbness in the lower limbs, you should see your doctor. Treatment may consist of bed rest, cold or hot packs, traction, physical therapy, or muscle-relaxing drugs. Serious injuries could result in the need for surgery.

Work at Protecting Your Back

By using common sense, you can help keep your back out of trouble. Every time you think about lifting, think defensively about back health and the possibility of a back injury. Follow good lifting techniques, not only at work, but also at home. Remember to:

1. Plan ahead.
2. Get help for heavy objects.
3. Never twist or turn while carrying an object.
4. Make sure your walking path is clear and safe.
5. Lift with your legs, not your back.
6. Use a proper posture when standing, sitting or reclining.
7. Follow a sensible diet and exercise program.
8. Report all workplace-related back injuries to your supervisor as soon as possible.

Instructor Notes

At this time, the supervisor or trainer should review with each attendee your company's policies and procedures relative to reporting any workplace-related injury. Also, if your company has a special back-injury prevention program you should discuss it at this time. Ask the attendees to discuss what types of jobs in your workplace are particularly troublesome as they relate to back injuries? Discuss special back injury concerns for bobtail drivers, cylinder truck drivers, yard laborers, service technicians, and customer service representatives. Have the attendees come up with solutions that will help prevent back injuries in these occupations.

April 2005 Test

Protect Your Back

Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: Read and answer each of the following questions. When complete, grade the test and review incorrect answers so each employee is “armed” with the correct answers before they leave the training.

1. Your physical condition has nothing to do with the possibility of you experiencing a back injury.
 - a. True
 - b. False

2. You need only bend your knees when lifting a load over 25 pounds.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. According to some experts, for every pound in your abdomen area, your back is subjected to ___ pounds of extra strain:
 - a. 1
 - b. 3
 - c. 5
 - d. 10

4. Pushing a load is preferred over pulling a load.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. You should always consult your physician should you decide to embark on a diet and exercise routine.
 - a. True
 - b. False

6. Back pain can be caused by a condition other than a back injury.
 - a. True
 - b. False

7. Twisting your body when you are carrying or lifting a load does not increase the likelihood of you sustaining a back injury.
 - a. True
 - b. False

8. When lifting a load, all of the items below apply except one:
 - a. Size up the load
 - b. Hurry as fast as possible
 - c. Use a proper posture
 - d. Sit the load down smoothly.
 - e. Use mechanical lifting aids when possible.

9. Most experts agree that sleeping on your _____ is least preferable for back health.
 - a. Left side
 - b. Back
 - c. Right side
 - d. Stomach

10. Workplace-related back injuries should be reported as soon as possible to your supervisor.
 - a. True
 - b. False

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Answer Sheet

1. b.
2. b.
3. d.
4. a.
5. a.
6. a.
7. b.
8. b.
9. d.
10. a.