

Back care and lifting

Why it's important

Back pain accounts for nearly a quarter of lost-time injuries and half of all compensation costs (both long-term and short-term).

Almost everyone has suffered back pain at some time. Common causes include sitting improperly, heavy lifting, falls, motor vehicle incidents and whole body vibration.

How to control the hazards

Workers are much less likely to suffer an injury if they have been trained to recognize high-risk tasks and have the necessary knowledge to modify the task or to ask for the task to be modified.

A regular exercise program, with some emphasis on back and abdominal strengthening and stabilization, can lessen the wear and tear of activities such as lifting on the back. Without a regular exercise program, a simple activity such as reaching for the phone can trigger a back problem.

Important tips about lifting

1. Start by assessing the shape and size of the load. If you think you will be unable to lift it on your own, ask for help.
2. Make sure the load is free or loose and able to be moved.
3. Check the travel route to make sure it's free of obstacles, debris and any slip or trip hazards.
4. Keep the load close to your body.
5. Do not twist while handling the load, as this will place extreme strain on your back.
6. Make sure you have firm footing, a wide stance, good grip and keep your arms straight.
7. Bend your knees as much as possible. If the load is large, you may have to stand slightly over it to start the lift.
8. Tighten your abdominal muscles and try to tuck your chin into your chest.

9. Initiate the lift with your body weight and lift with your legs, as they are a larger and stronger muscle group.

10. If you are unable to use a smooth and slow lifting approach, use momentum to help bring the load closer to your body.

Show and tell

Demonstrate the ideal ways to carry loads:

- For small compact loads: Bend with your knees, keep your back straight and lift with your legs.
- For large loads: Maintain the natural curve in your spine as much as possible, stick your behind out and tighten your abdominal muscles. This will enhance the natural curve in your lower back and keep your back muscles strong.
- For a two-person lift: Make sure there is clear communication and coordination between you and the other lifter. It's a good idea to simulate the lift before attempting the task.
- If you need tools to help with the lift, make sure they are in good condition before you use them.
- Use proper-fitting and appropriate hand protection whenever possible.
- Do not use a tight grip when handling the load, as this causes more stress and fatigue in your wrist and forearm muscles and tendons.

Notes:

