



## Don't Let Lifting Become a Strain

Approximately 10 million employees suffer work-impairing back injuries each year, resulting in productivity loss and billions of dollars towards workers' comp, according to the Department of Labor. Back strains are the most common workplace injury, and injuries from back strain off the job can be just as painful – and cost workers lost time.

### **There are four questions to ask before you begin lifting:**

- 1) Is this too heavy for me to lift and carry alone?
- 2) How high do I have to lift it?
- 3) How far do I have to carry it?
- 4) Am I trying to impress anyone by lifting this?

After assessing the situation, you can determine if you're able to lift the object on your own or if you should ask for help. At work, contact your supervisor or another employee; at home, ask a friend, family member, or neighbor. Once you've determined that an object is safe for you to lift by yourself, keep the following lifting precautions in mind and make a habit to use them:

- Use slow and smooth movements. Do not use hurried or jerky movements.
- Keep your body facing the object while you lift it. Do not twist your back.
- Keep the load close to your body. Do not reach out to lift or raise object above your head.
- Never carry a load that blocks your vision.
- Grip the object with your entire hand, rather than just your fingers.
- Draw the object close to you, holding your elbows close to your body to keep the load and your body weight centered.
- Let your legs do the work. Bend at the legs and push up from the waist.
- Keep your back straight and tighten your stomach muscles.
- Use dollies, carts, or other mechanical equipment whenever possible.
- Point your feet in the direction you want to move. This will prevent you from twisting your body.
- Set the load down by squatting while maintaining the natural curve of your spine.
- The best level to lift an object is between your knees to your shoulders. If possible, store materials at knee level.
- Reduce the weight and size of the load whenever this is an option.
- Don't overdo it! If you have to strain to carry the load, it's too heavy!

You can also reduce the risk of a back injury by keeping your back and abdominal muscles strong and flexible through exercise. Remember also to eat healthy, drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration, and get plenty of sleep. Avoid sleeping on your stomach; this can also cause back strain.

### For More Information:

National Safety Council, Members-Only site,  
<http://www.nsc.org/groups/members/articles/article.cfm?id=166>  
Centers for Disease Control, <http://www.cdc.gov>  
NASA Langley Research Center, <http://www.larc.nasa.gov>

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