

## “How to Lift and Carry Safely”

### Why It Matters:

- Nearly 1,000 American workers injure their backs on the job every day.
- The majority of these injuries occur while an employee is lifting, carrying, or unloading materials.
- Once injured, backs are more susceptible to reinjury.
- Back injuries contribute significantly to lost workdays and lost productivity.
- A significant percentage of compensation claims involve back injuries, costing U.S. businesses billions of dollars a year.

### What are some work situations that may put you in “awkward” positions?

1. Jobs that require you to bend and reach into bins or containers to retrieve or place material.
2. Overhead work, installing or servicing equipment, pulling wire, cleaning ceilings, etc.
3. Floor or ground level jobs such as installing or servicing equipment, cleaning, etc.
4. Work tasks in confined or small spaces where there is limited range of motion such as boilers, hatches, pipes, tanks, vaults, crawl spaces, etc.
5. Jobs on ladders, work platforms or scaffolding where you may over-reach to adjust, clean, install or service.
6. Pulling loads, instead of pushing them, when removing equipment or other materials.
7. Repetitive tasks that require twisting of the back such as loading or handling material 90 to 180 degrees.

**Safe lifting is as easy as one, two, three.** The secret to safe lifting is to:

1. **Assume the safe lifting position.** Stand close to the object and keep a wide stance. Keep feet turned out and heels down. Then squat by bending at the hips and knees. Ears, shoulders, and hips should form a nearly straight, vertical line.
2. **Prepare to lift.** Pull the load close to the body (this reduces pressure on the back) and grasp the object firmly. Tighten stomach muscles.
3. **Let your legs do the lifting.** Maintain the natural curves of the spine and rise up from the squatting position using the legs to power the lift. Don't bend over at the neck, shoulders, or waist while lifting.

When it's time to unload, face the chosen spot and lower the load slowly – again by using the legs, not the back. Simply bend the knees and lower the body with the load, keeping the back comfortably straight.

**All lifts are not created equal.** Teach your employees these techniques for special lifting situations.

1. **Reaching overhead:** Use a step stool or ladder. Slide the load close to the body. Then let the legs and arms do all the work.
2. **Oversized or heavy loads:** Use a two-person lift. Work as a team. Designate one person to direct the lift. Lift at the same time. Keep the load level when carrying and move smoothly together. Unload at the same time.
3. **Long objects:** Carry lumber, pipe, and other long objects over the shoulder, being careful the ends don't hit anyone or anything.
4. **Bags and sacks:** Assume the safe lifting position. Grasp the load at opposite top and bottom corners. Power the body up with the legs and use the arms to raise the load to rest on the hip. Fully stand, and move the load to rest on the shoulder.

**Don't forget to reinforce safe behavior and to correct unsafe behavior.** To paraphrase an old saying, you can teach employees how to lift safely, but you can't make them lift safely – without regular reinforcement, that is. When you see an employee lifting safely, take a moment to provide some positive feedback. Say something like, "Good to see you practicing those safe lifting techniques we talked about. Keep up the good work!" And when you see an employee lifting incorrectly, be sure to stop and correct the unsafe behavior on the spot. Say something like, "I'm concerned you're going to hurt your back if you keep lifting that way. If you bend your knees like this [you demonstrate] and lift with your legs, you're going to save your back. Go ahead. Try it. I'm sure you'll see the difference."

### **Power Warm-Ups**

You will work better if you start each day with slow stretches. These warm-ups let you ease comfortably into your workday and help you avoid injuries.

#### **Leg and back warm-up**

1. Prop one foot on a chair or a stool for support
2. Take a deep breath
3. Ease forward slowly – keep your back slightly curved
4. Blow slowly outward as you ease forward to a seven count
5. Repeat seven times
6. Switch and do the same with the other foot

#### **Backbend**

1. Stand with your feet about 12 inches apart
2. Support the small of your back with your hands
3. Hold your stomach in firmly and take a deep breath
4. Arch backward – bend your head and neck as you go, blowing air slowly out for seven counts
5. Repeat seven times

#### **Power lifting tips**

- ◆ Protect your hands and feet by wearing safety gear
- ◆ Size up the load – tip it on its side to see if you can carry it comfortably. Get help if the load is too big or bulky for one person. Check for nails, splinters, rough strapping and sharp edges.
- ◆ Lift it right – make sure your footing is solid. Keep your back straight, with no curving or slouching. Center your body over your feet, get a good grip on the object and pull it close to you. Pull your stomach in firmly. Lift with your legs, not your back; if you need to turn, move your feet and don't twist your back.

Improper lifting isn't the *only* thing that causes back injuries. People who do not also stay in good physical and mental condition are at high risk for back problems.

### **It's Up To You – Take Good Care Of Your Body and Save Your Back!**

