

## Back Injury Avoidance

### KEY POINTS

Over 70,000 people a year experience back injuries and describe them as the most costly and painful accidents of their lives. Low back is the most frequently injured part of the body. Strains and sprains are a leading cause of disabling injuries.

Training can impact improper lifting, a major element in back injuries, and safety engineering can eliminate many other causes. However, it won't be enough unless the community services worker uses common sense on the job.

Management should also evaluate those work areas that have the greatest frequency of back injuries. Are there tasks which have a high incidence of injury to the lower back? If a certain task creates problems, ergonomic principles may be applied. Perhaps the problem can be engineered out through the reduction of the weight to be lifted, partial automation or the use of material handling equipment. Even after this has been done, it is important to train the community services worker in the hazards associated with manual lifting in the day to day operations.

The following tips might help avoid a painful and costly back injury:

1. When working with lawn/maintenance equipment, use your legs, not your back.
2. When moving tables or equipment, make sure of the weight and position before attempting the job alone. Better to take the time to use the help of another on the job rather than suffer a back injury by trying to hurry.

Limit the weight of loads to be lifted. Items that need moving by manual lift should not weight more than 50 lbs., preferably 25 lbs. No one should attempt to lift a 100 lb. weight without assistance.

Don't twist with the load. Proper lifting techniques teach workers to bend their knees and pick the load up carefully. However, many make the mistake of twisting with the load — this can put additional strain on the back, and may lead to an injury.

1. Don't reach or extend oneself to lift an object. Leaning to lift even a relatively light object, without support, can cause a back injury. Take the time to get close in for a proper manual lift.
2. Don't jump off a ladder or riding mower, especially after sitting for a long period of time. Sitting is more stressful for the back than standing or walking. After the back has been in a sitting or resting position for a period of time, it is not "ready" for the jolt that accompanies a leap or jump to the ground.

Remember — community services workers should also use safe lifting practices at home and during recreational activities. It doesn't do much good to practice safety all week at the workplace, only to injure one's back while performing daily activities at home.

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