

Back Injury Avoidance

KEY POINTS

- When working with heavy materials, tools and equipment, lift with your legs, not your back.
- Get help when moving materials, tools or equipment.
- Limit the weight of loads to be lifted.
- Don't twist with the load.
- Don't reach or extend oneself to lift an object.
- Dismount all equipment carefully. Jumping off a tractor or lawnmower after sitting for long periods of time is dangerous.
- Use material handling aids.

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

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 employee 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 employee in the hazards associated with manual lifting in the workplace.

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

- When working with heavy materials, tools and equipment, lift using your legs, not your back.
- When moving heavy materials, tools and equipment, make sure of its weight and position of the equipment before attempting the job alone. Better to take the time to use the help of a co-worker 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 weigh more than 50 lbs., preferably 25 lbs. No employee should attempt to lift a 100 lb. weight without assistance.
- Don't twist with the load. Proper lifting techniques teach employees to bend their knees and pick the load up carefully. However, many employees make the mistake of twisting with the load—this can put additional strain on the back, and may lead to an injury.
- 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.

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- Use material handling aids whenever possible, such as hand trucks, dollies or carts.
- Don't jump off a tractor or lawnmower, 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 from the driver's seat of a tractor or lawnmower.

Remember— employees 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.

For further information or assistance, contact your Zenith Safety & Health consultant.

Zenith provides workplace safety resources at: **TheZenith.com**

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