

SAFETY MATTERS

BACK SAFETY

Did you know that more than one million work related back injuries occur every year? These injuries cause lost wages, lost time from work and long-term pain; but these injuries don't have to happen. By using the following tips for proper lifting and posture, you can reduce your risk of back injuries.

How to Lift Properly

- Get a firm footing. Keep your feet apart (shoulder width) for a stable base; point toes out.
- Bend your knees. Don't bend at the waist. Keep the principles of leverage in mind. Don't do more work than you have to. Maintain your three natural back curves. (Cervical, Thoracic, Lumbar)
- Tighten stomach muscles. Abdominal muscles support your spine when you lift, offsetting the force of the load. Train muscle groups to work together.
- Lift with your legs. Let your powerful leg muscles do the work of lifting, not your weaker back muscles. Maintain your three natural curves.
- Keep load close. Don't hold the load away from your body. The closer it is to your spine, the less force it exerts on your back.
- Keep your back upright. Whether you are lifting or putting down the load, don't add the weight of your body to the load. Avoid twisting; it can cause injury.

Good Posture Tips

Good posture gives your back the support it needs. Try to avoid prolonged positions – whether at work, home, or play – that put stress on your back. Follow these posture tips for sitting, standing, and sleeping, for around-the-clock protection.

- **Sitting** tends to tilt the pelvis the wrong way, and is 1 ½ times more stressful for your back than standing and walking. Don't sit too long. Get up, stretch, and walk around occasionally. Support your back so you can sit up straight. If your chair is not supportive, use a pillow or backrest.
- **Standing** can be hard on your back too. Check your posture by placing your head and back against a wall. Be sure that your three natural back curves are in their balanced alignment. Holding this position, walk away from the wall. Stand with one foot elevated to a comfortable level. Switch feet every half hour or so.
- **At your desk**, work at a comfortable height that doesn't make you slouch or reach. Adjust your chair height to keep knees level with hips.
- **Sleeping** rests the back. When you are lying down, your back doesn't have to support your body weight. Use a firm mattress. (Firm waterbeds are fine.) Sleep on your side with knees bent, or on your back with knees elevated.