

▶ *Hanover Risk Solutions*

## Ergonomic Solutions— Safe Lifting

Over one million workers suffer back injuries each year. Twenty-five percent of all workers' compensation indemnity claims are related to back injuries. Back injuries are painful and affect all aspects of life. The chance of re-injury after a back injury is significant.

Doing the following before you lift can help reduce the potential for back injuries:

- Plan ahead; assess the lift and your surroundings. Knowing what you're doing and where you're going will prevent you from making awkward movements while holding something heavy.
- Consider whether the load is of a size and weight that you can adequately handle.
- Check that the path of travel for the lift is clear of obstructions.
- Think about whether the load can be broken down into smaller components. When carrying multiple small loads, try using a tote box with handles.
- Make sure the load will not interfere with your vision as you are walking.
- Consider whether the load can be lifted more safely with the help of a co-worker. If you are lifting with another person make sure you both agree on the plan.
- See what mechanical devices might be available to help you lift the load more safely.
- Think about how the load is being given to you and how you are giving it to the next person. The closer to waist level you can receive it and drop it off to the next person, the easier it will be for both of you. If you are using shelves, put heavier objects on the shelves closer to waist level. Put lighter objects on the upper or lower shelves.

- Work with your supervisor to improve conditions that are outside your control. Some things may take awhile to improve but will be worth the effort.

While lifting always remember the following:

- Get as close as possible to the load. You will be a stronger and more stable lifter if the object is held close to your body rather than at the end of your reach.
- Center yourself over and in front of the load with your feet shoulder width apart. A solid base of support is important while lifting. Holding your feet too close together will be unstable, too far apart will hinder movement.
- Tighten your stomach muscles; this helps to support the back.
- Avoid lifting from the floor whenever possible. If you can't avoid lifting from the floor, focus on getting the load as close to your hips as possible. For a smaller load like a box, this can mean squatting down, bending your knees, and keeping your head up and your back in its normal arch. Let your legs do the lifting in this situation.
- Get a good tight hold on the load and keep it close to your body.
- Move with a smooth motion, lifting straight up.
- Keep the load in front of your body. Do not twist your back. If you need to turn, move your feet. If you need to walk, keep your nose and feet pointed in your direction of travel.

- Carry the load at waist level.
- Set the load down and rest if you become tired. Look for a surface around waist level to rest the load on.
- Avoid ending your lift at waist level whenever possible. If this can't be avoided, focus on keeping the load as close to your hips as possible. For a smaller load like a box, reverse the steps outlined above for picking up the load.
- Get a good night's sleep. Fatigued muscles are more prone to injury. A fatigued mind is more likely to make mistakes that lead to an injury or accident. The mattress you sleep on is important in waking up rested with fewer aches and pains.
- Manage stress by organizing your daily routines and controlling your reactions to unexpected situations. The muscle tension caused by stress makes you more prone to injury. Practice releasing that tension from your body.
- Lift safely at home as well as at work.

Here are some other helpful tips for avoiding back injury:

- Use mechanical devices whenever they are available. When using them, push the load rather than pulling it. Keep your back in its normal arch and use your body weight and legs to push the load.
- Maintain a healthy weight; remember, your back is also carrying any extra weight that is on your body.
- Eat healthy, stay hydrated and exercise regularly. A strong body is less likely to be injured while lifting.

Following these guidelines should help to reduce the potential of becoming one of the many people presently suffering from back injuries caused by unsafe lifting.

To learn more about ergonomics, visit <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/ergonomics/index.html>

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