



## Back Safety & Safe Lifting

## TALKING POINTS

### Guidelines for Lifting, Carrying and Moving Things Safely

The most common injuries in the workplace result from improper lifting. Fortunately, a few simple measures go a long way toward preventing painful injuries. Injuries that can keep hurting for a long time – or for a lifetime!

While construction, manufacturing and service industry workers frequently injure their backs, healthcare workers experience even higher rates of back injuries. This is due to moving and handling patients every day. Like other workers who employ industry specific tools and equipment, nurses and other caregivers should adhere to safe patient handling methods like engineering controls, assistive devices and aids to lift, transfer and reposition patients and residents.

### Preventing Back Injury

Why do so many people suffer from lower back pain? Lifting improperly by using your weaker back muscles instead of your stronger leg muscles requires you to use more energy to lift. Also, bending at the waist puts tremendous pressure on the back muscles and discs. Lifting from your waist places 10 times the weight of the object in added pressure to your back! For example, lifting a 10-pound object puts 100 pounds of pressure on your lower back.

### Safe Lifting Basics

No matter what kind of lifting is needed, think about the lift ahead of time. Know where you will place the item once it's lifted and make sure that there's a clear path to that spot. Size up the object and determine how to handle it. Wear gloves if necessary, to get a better grip, or if the object has sharp edges.

- Know your limits and don't be afraid to get help when necessary. Since a back injury can last a lifetime, it's worth asking for assistance.
- Plan the lift: Test the weight by attempting to pick up a corner. Determine your walking path. Remove any obstructions or slip, trip or falling hazards from the walkway.
- Take a balanced stance - stand with your feet stable and shoulder-width apart. Squat down to lift and get as close as you can to the load. Don't bend over. Keep your back straight – perpendicular to the floor.
- Get a secure grip and hug the load. Lift gradually using your legs, keeping the load close to your chest and keeping the back and neck straight.
- Once standing, change direction by pointing your feet and turning your whole body. Avoid twisting at your waist. To put the load down, use these guidelines in reverse. In tight quarters, use a series of lifts to change position.



## **Labor-Saving Devices**

Manual and motorized devices, including forklifts and similar machines, are useful in reducing and eliminating strains from lifting heavy items. These machines must be used properly. OSHA has a specific standard concerning the safe use of motorized forklifts. The OSHA standard includes training and skills evaluation, recordkeeping, usage guidelines and maintenance. Proper training and enforcement of safe-operation rules are critical, because unsafe acts (human error) are the leading cause of forklift accidents.

Similarly, healthcare providers need special training when using patient lifts and other electric or mechanical equipment.

## **Keep these safety tips in mind when lifting:**

- Use labor-saving devices to avoid carrying and lifting. Depending on your job, dollies, hand trucks, pallet jacks, patient transfer aids or forklifts can eliminate the need for potentially dangerous lifts.
- Avoid unnecessary lifting and carrying by keeping frequently-used items close at hand.
- Use caution when carrying items on stairways. Hold on to railings. When carrying items on ladders, climb carefully. Make sure to have a firm grip on the handrails. Do not exceed the ladder's rated load capacity.

## **Things to avoid:**

- Heavy lifting – especially repetitive lifting over a long period of time.
- Twisting at the waist while lifting or holding a heavy load. This frequently happens when placing items such as boxes in and out of storage racks.
- Reaching and lifting over your head, across a table, or out of the back of a truck.
- Lifting or carrying objects with awkward or odd shapes.
- Working in awkward, uncomfortable positions.
- Sitting or standing too long in one position or sitting with poor posture. These can be very hard on the lower back.

## **How else can you injure your back?**

- Slipping on a wet floor or ice.
- Falling down a flight of steps.
- Attempting to catch an object that falls from your grasp.
- Failing to get assistance when needed.