

CONSTRUCTION

EMPLOYER GUIDE

BACK SAFETY and SAFE LIFTING

Guidelines for Safe Lifting, Carrying and Moving Things Safely

Safe lifting can keep you from hurting your back. A few simple measures can go a long way toward preventing back injuries, muscle strains, cuts and abrasions.

Preventing Back Injury

It is easy to strain your back by lifting improperly. Bending at the waist puts a great strain on the back muscles. Using your weaker back muscles instead of your stronger leg muscles requires you to use more energy to lift. This can hurt your back. *A painful back injury can last a lifetime!*

Don't lift from your waist. It takes 10 times the effort to lift that way! For example, lifting a 10-pound object puts 100 pounds of pressure on your lower back.

Safe Lifting Basics

- 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.
- Know your limits and get help when necessary. Understand that 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 with your feet shoulder-width apart. Squat down to lift and get as close as you can to the load.
- 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 turn 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.



Keep these Safety Tips in mind when Lifting:

- Use labor-saving devices to avoid carrying and lifting. Dollies, hand trucks, pallet jacks and forklifts can eliminate the need for potentially dangerous lifts.
- Avoid lifting and carrying by keeping frequently-used items close at hand.
- Use caution when carrying items on stairways and ladders. Do not exceed 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.



It is also possible to 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.

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 on forklifts 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.

