

## Safe Lifting

Back injuries are one of the most common injuries throughout a workplace. More than half of back related injuries are caused by bodily reaction and exertion which includes improper lifting. When back injuries occur, the recovery time varies based on the strain. This may range from a few days to several months with potential long-term effects.

Manual lifting is a common task in many workplaces; thus, it is important to know the steps and techniques involved to reduce your chance of injury. Always stop and think before bending to pick up an object, and over time, safe lifting techniques should become a habit.

## What is the Danger?

The back is a network of fragile ligaments, discs, and muscles which can easily be thrown out of order. The back's complex design breaks down when it is forced to perform activities it was not designed to do. Lifting with the back twisted or bent are examples of ways to pull a muscle or rupture a disc. One sure way to risk injuring the back is to lift heavy or bulky loads improperly or unassisted. Never be afraid to ask for help with loads that you know you cannot lift safely. Lift with a good sense and a little extra help from a co-worker or mechanical aid when necessary.

If you decide you are capable of lifting, even for lighter objects – always follow these rules:

### Proper Lifting Techniques

- Spread your feet about shoulders-width apart.
- Your feet should be close to the object.
- Get a firm grip on the object.
- Keep your back straight and elbows close to your body.
- Keeping your back straight and head up, straighten your legs to lift object.
- At the same time tighten your stomach muscles to provide back support (*Do not hold your breath while doing this*).
- While carrying the object DO NOT twist or bend at the waist, move your feet and legs when turning.
- Keep the load as close to your body as possible.
- To set the object down, use the same technique used to lift the object.



## Safety Tips

- ✓ Wear proper clothing and PPE when lifting certain objects (steel toe/anti-slip shoes and nitrile gloves)
- ✓ Stretch before attempting to lift a heavy object or at beginning of shift
- ✓ Store materials at waist height to reduce the strain on your back
- ✓ Assess the object you are going to be lifting to determine the weight and best place to grip the object
- ✓ Ensure that your path is free of slipping and tripping hazards
- ✓ Know your own lifting restrictions and capabilities and do not overexert yourself. If the item is heavier (greater than 50 lbs), ask for help in performing a team lift.
- ✓ Use carts, dollies, forklifts, and hoists to move materials
- ✓ Use carrying tools with handles to carry odd-shaped loads
- ✓ Take your time. You are more likely to be injured when you are tired or cold (decrease in flexibility of muscles and joints)
- ✓ Lift as smoothly as possible and avoid jerking movements.

## Demonstrate

Review Manual Lifting – Safe Work Procedure (SWP) with workers. If you do not have a SWP, contact your S2SA Advisor for a Manual Lifting SWP template.

Demonstrate or ask workers for a volunteer to show proper lifting techniques with an object in the workplace

## Discussion

What are common objects you find yourself lifting frequently?

What are some controls to reduce the chance of injury from improper lifting?

Discuss the 'Power Zone' for lifting.

- Object close to the body
- Mid-thigh and mid-chest height
- Comparable to the strike zone in baseball



