Huntsville Center Safety Gram
Engineering the Edge for Safety Excellence
13 May 2011

Prevent Bad Backs

Among the most common and costly injuries suffered by workers are back injuries. These can involve injuries to the spinal column, and strains or sprains to the muscles, tendons and ligaments of the back. Lifting injuries aren't usually caused by picking up vehicle transmissions or 45 gallon drums. Instead, they frequently involve improper lifting of common smaller items such as boxes of computer paper or stacks of manuals.

Apply ergonomics to reduce the need for manual lifting in your workplace. Talk to your supervisor about your ideas for more efficient and easier materials handling.

Here are some tips for safe lifting:

- Plan your route so you have a clear path to carry the item. Have a place to put the item down once you reach your destination.
- Check the weight of the item you will be lifting to see if you will need help. Do this by grasping the object firmly by an outside corner and tipping it towards you. You should be able to tell if it is too heavy.
- Use the proper devices for lifting and carrying. Materials handling equipment such as handcarts and stock pickers can help you move materials without straining your back.
- Ask for help from co-workers. When you do a team lift, appoint one person as the leader who tells everyone else when to pick up the object and put it down.
- Bend your knees when you lift instead of stooping over. Hold your back straight and vertical to the ground. If you keep your head up, your eyes looking ahead and your stomach muscles tight, you will help yourself maintain this posture.
- Keep the item close to your body. Lifting or carrying an object at arm's length puts much more strain on your back.

Here are more tips for preventing back injuries:

- Do warm-ups before any physical exertion.
- Avoid excessive bending, reaching or twisting motions.
- Stand up straight, but not rigid. Keep your knees flexed and maintain the natural curves in your back.
- When sitting, choose a comfortable, relaxed position in which your back is straight. Don't slouch.
- When you are lying down, keep your back curved naturally. Use a low pillow under your head and neck.
- Avoid sleeping on your stomach.
- Maintain physical fitness. Exercise to keep the muscles of your back and abdomen strong.

Arrange your work area to decrease the need for lifting and moving materials. Proper planning can reduce the need to handle stock unnecessarily.

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