

Avoiding Back Injuries

Back injuries are very common in the workplace. They can be caused by improper lifting, reaching, pushing, or pulling. Slips and falls are another leading cause of back injuries.

Back injuries are often the result of an individual handling materials or an object incorrectly. Many times people will injure their backs because they underestimate a load or take on more than they can handle safely.

How can one reduce the risk of injuring their back? To prevent back injuries requires planning, lifting correctly, and getting help for heavy or awkward loads.

Plan Ahead

Before trying to move something, plan both the load and the route. Doing so will allow you to evaluate hazards, limitations, route safety, and final placement. When evaluating the load, consider its weight, shape, and what it is. Some things to check are:

- Do you need special gear or gloves for handling the item?
- Is the size, shape, and weight of the object within your lifting limits?
- Are there loose parts or sharp edges?
- Can you get a good grip on the object?
- Will you be able to see over the load and maneuver it along the route?
- What kind of assistance do you need...people, mechanical aids, or specialized equipment?



Route and Placement Planning

Before moving the object, check the route you will take and the final destination where you will set the object. Consider:

- *Route* – Are there steps, tripping hazards, doors, or tight passageways? What are the floor conditions; are they wet, oily, greasy? How is the lighting? Are there any blind corners?
- *Destination* – Where will you place the load? Is there adequate room for it? Is it the right place to put it? If placing on a shelf or rack, is it stable enough to support it?

Actions to Avoid Back Injuries

- Reduce bending, twisting, and overreaching motions.
- If possible, reduce the weight of the load.
- Use a mechanical aid such as a cart, buggy, hand truck, forklift, etc.
- Reduce the travel distance the object is carried.



Lifting Properly

Lifting should be done with the back in the most natural, upright position.

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| Approach the Load | Face the load so you won't have to lift and turn. If load is at a low level, squat and lift with your legs. Avoid bending. |
| Grasp the Load | Keep the load as close to the body as possible. Maintain a good grasp of the object using the whole hand. Wear gloves and check for pinch points or sharp edges. |
| Carry the Load | Lead with your feet as you carry the load. Turn using your legs and feet; do not twist your back. |
| Place the Load | Put load down with the same care used to lift it. If placing at a low level, squat to put it down. |

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