



PROTECTING YOUR BACK

Safety Suggestions For Keeping Your Back In Shape

Your back is a more complicated part of your body than you might think. It is made up of individual bones, called vertebrae, which must be properly aligned in order for you to move freely and without pain. In between the vertebrae are discs that cushion and protect your back from shocks and bumps and prevent the vertebrae from touching each other. It takes the muscles of your back, stomach and legs working together to maintain good spinal alignment. Your vertebrae, discs and muscles must all be working properly in order for you to work effectively and pain-free. Years of bad posture, bad lifting habits, improper movement and lack of exercise will almost certainly lead to back problems, so before the years catch up to you, consider taking the following steps to maintain a healthy back.

POSTURE

The way you stand, sit and even sleep can have a big effect on your back. Wear supportive shoes when standing for extended periods and if possible, stand on an anti-fatigue mat. Propping one foot up on a bar or footrest reduces the total strain that standing puts on your back.

If you sleep in a curled posture you may be placing strain on your neck or back muscles. If your back or neck feel sore in the morning, try using extra pillows to support your head and waist. Your mattress may also be a culprit. If it is too soft it won't provide sufficient support under the natural curve of your spine, also leading to back strain and pain.

When you sit down, remember that staying in one position for too long can lead to back strain. Standing and moving around will help loosen up cold muscles. When seated, sit with your feet planted firmly on the floor. This helps to keep your back in an upright position. If your feet do not easily reach the floor, use a footrest.

MOVEMENT

Lifting, turning, pushing and pulling can have devastating effects on back health if not done properly. One incorrect lift can do an immense amount of damage. Some workers may feel that after years of lifting without injury they don't need to change their habits or learn new rules.

Unfortunately, one bad lift can change their mind, but by then it will be too late.

Use the letters B. A. C. K. to remember general, common sense rules for lifting.

- B. Bow your back in. This requires support from your abdominal muscles.
- A. Align vertebrae. Find your back's "neutral" position and then use your muscles to hold it.
- C. Chin up. Keeping your chin up helps you hold your good back alignment.
- K. Keep feet on diagonal.

Following these simple rules will help you avoid back injuries. Most importantly, follow the tried and true adage: lift with the legs and not with the back. The muscles in your legs are bigger, stronger and much better prepared to take a load than those in your back. Leg strains also heal more quickly and easily than back injuries.

When turning with a load, always turn with your feet. Taking a step may seem like adding wasted movement to your task, but it will remove a great deal of strain from your back. Twisting the back is especially dangerous when holding a heavy load. The movement can easily lead to pulled back muscles and vertebrae pulled out of alignment.

When you have a choice between pushing and pulling, push! Pulling often requires bending at the waist in order to get leverage; pushing is much easier on the back. Whether pushing or pulling, handles should be high enough so that bending is minimized. To minimize the risk of twisting, always use both arms.

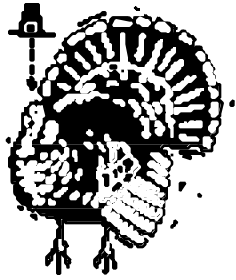
EXERCISE

Exercise is important for your general health, but crucial for a healthy back. Protect your back with regular stretching and strengthening exercises. Before any activity that requires back muscles, warm those muscles up and always warm up slowly. Stretch the muscles that are going to be worked. Exercises that strengthen the back, leg and stomach muscles increase your ability to protect your back during lifting. Follow every workout with a cool-down period.

QUESTIONS?

Call your supervisor or Tom Vogel in the Sacramento office.

HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!



SAFETY TRIVIA Questions

The first three persons to answer this question correctly will win a DFA coffee mug and hat.

Ossicles are:

- A. Devices to control vibration by dampening
- B. Meters used to measure vibration.
- C. Bones in the human ear.

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