

Safe Lifting: Back Injury Prevention

Most of us know the basic steps to safe lifting:

- Lift with your legs, not with your back,
- Pull the load close, and
- Don't twist

Back injuries don't occur just when we're lifting something. They can occur as a result of sitting with poor posture, working in awkward positions, trying to catch something that's falling, over-reaching or slipping and falling, among others.

**Back injuries have been called
"the nation's number one workplace safety problem" by OSHA.**

Whenever you are using your back to complete a task you have an exposure for back injury. This is where body mechanics and preparation come into play. Stop and think before you move and determine the best way to approach the task. If you're lifting a box, determine how heavy it is and whether or not you can handle it alone. If it's too heavy or too awkward to lift on your own use a cart, dolly, pallet jack, forklift, overhead hoist, or team lift. Plan your path of travel and make sure it is clear. Remember that when you put the box down you still need to consider good body mechanics, bend your knees and keep the load close, just as you did when lifting the box.

If you need to reach something that is over your head, you might need a ladder. Portable stairs are ladders with handrails on each side and wheels so you can roll them. When you put your weight on the stairs, the wheels lock. These are helpful if you need to reach a high rack, because they are stable and provide climbing support. You may need to work with another person, so you do not have to carry items up or down the stairs or ladder.

Last, but not least, you can always break down the load, so it is smaller and lighter.

There's always time to make a second trip and prevent a back injury.