

Lifting Safely Meeting Kit

BACK INJURIES RESULTING FROM LIFTING TASKS

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) also says that more than one million workers experience back injuries each year. One fourth of all workers compensation indemnity claims are a result of back injuries. Low back pain is one of the most common reason that people miss work, second only to the common cold. In America, we spend more than \$100 billion annually in medical bills, disability and lost productivity at work from back injuries and illnesses. **A BLS survey shows that 75% of back injuries occurred while performing lifting tasks, which underscores the importance of reducing back injuries caused by lifting.**

LIFTING/HANDLING AND MUSCULOSKELETAL INJURIES (MSIs)

Changing work practices and work policies, and training workers in proper lifting and handling techniques, can limit risk of **MSIs**. Some questions to consider:

- Can the task design be changed? For example, changing a carrying task to a pushing or pulling task.
- Can workers be given time to rest or recover when lifting or handling loads?
- Can work demands and work pace be balanced more effectively
- Can the tasks be varied?

RISKS/DANGERS

Workers are exposed to risk when they lift, lower, or carry objects. Risk factors include:

- The weight of the load

- How close the load is to the body. A load lifted far from the body imposes more stress on the back than the same load lifted close to the body
- The distance the load has to be carried
- The initial height of the load and the vertical distance lifted
- Lifting in combination with twisting
- How long the load has to be carried
- The number and frequency of lifts performed

THE LIFT EXAMINED

Think before you lift: Plan the lift. Where is the load going to be placed? Will help be needed with the load? Is there equipment you could use, such as a hoist, that could help with the lift?

Remove obstructions, such as discarded wrapping materials. For long lifts, such as from floor to shoulder height, consider resting the load midway on a table or bench to change your grip on it.

Keep the load close to the waist: Keep the load close to the waist for as long as possible while lifting to reduce the amount of pressure on the back.

Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the body. If closely approaching the load is not possible, try to slide it towards the body before trying to lift it.

Adopt a stable position: Your feet should be apart with 1 leg slightly forward to maintain balance (alongside the load, if it's on the ground).

Be prepared to move your feet during the lift to maintain a stable posture. Wearing over-tight clothing or unsuitable footwear, such as high heels or flip flops, may make this difficult.

Ensure a good hold on the load: Where possible, hug the load close to the body.

Do not bend your back when lifting: A slight bending of the back,

hips and knees at the start of the lift is preferable to either fully flexing the back (stooping) or fully flexing the hips and knees.

Do not bend the back any further while lifting: This can happen if the legs begin to straighten before starting to raise the load.

Do not twist when you lift: Avoid twisting the back or leaning sideways, especially while the back is bent.

Look ahead: Keep your head up when handling the load. Look ahead, not down at the load.

Move smoothly: Do not jerk or snatch the load. This makes it harder to keep control and increases the risk of injury.

Know your limits: Do not lift or handle more than you can easily manage.

Lower down, then adjust: Put the load down and then adjust. If you need to position the load precisely, put it down first, then slide it into the desired position.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Use mechanical means (e.g. hand trucks, pushcarts, etc.) when possible for heavier or awkward loads.
- It is easier and safer to push than to pull.
- Keep loads as close to the body as possible and do not twist while lifting, carrying, or setting down a load. Nose, shoulders, hips, and toes should all be facing the same direction.
- Minimize reaching.
- As a general rule, bend at the knees, not the hips.
- Get help when needed. Do not lift or carry things you don't feel comfortable with, no matter how light the load.
- Plan ahead for all parts of the lift: lifting, carrying, and setting down.
- Try to utilize proper handholds while lifting. If an item does not have a good handhold, think of ways to remedy this,

such as placing the item in a container with good handholds, creating a safe and proper handhold with an appropriate tool, etc.

- Use personal protective equipment where needed, such as gloves with good grip and steel-toed boots.
- Implement rest breaks and job rotation for frequent and/or heavy lifting.
- Place items to be lifted within the “power zone”. The power zone is close to the body, between the mid-thigh and mid-chest of the person doing the lifting.

FINAL WORD

Back injuries and repetitive strain injuries are problems that all workers can do without. Good planning and safe work regimen can prevent these injuries throughout all white and blue collar workplaces.

Whether at work or at home, lifting heavy objects can be unavoidable. These quick tips and reminders for safe lifting techniques could save you from a potential injury and will help keep you healthy and safe!