

Avoiding Overexertion and Overextension

Week Number 7 (February 12 - 18)

Overexertion is going beyond what our bodies are normally able to do.

Perhaps the primary cause of overexertion is working at a physically exhausting job for too long. Severe fatigue can set in, which can be harmful by itself. In addition, the reduced awareness under such conditions can cause other serious accidents.

Another form of overexertion can occur when attempting to lift or move heavy or awkward loads by hand. Back injuries are probably the most commonly occurring injuries associated with this type of overexertion, followed by sprains, strains or hernias.

Overextension primarily deals with motion or balance. How many times have you tried reaching out beyond the side of a ladder and nearly suffered a fall? Maybe you weren't so lucky. Don't risk your safety - take the time to move your ladder if you are unable to reach your work properly. Reaching out too far from a platform, scaffold, or lift is also a dangerous extension.

Overextension can also occur if you jump from one level to another or across a ditch. Running down stairs or taking two steps at a time is asking for an injury. Even neck rotation can be harmful; physicians recommend tilting the head in each direction, without pushing or pulling the neck to increase the stretch.

Stay within the bounds of your physical limits, and don't push yourself too hard. Activities that do not cause overexertion or overextension in one person may seriously injure another.

One of the most effective means to combat overextension and overexertion is stretching. Although the following exercises might seem simplistic, starting your workday with them could save you an injury. Try them as you read.

- Standing Rotation - Place your hands on your hips. Keep your feet facing forward and your knees slightly bent. Rotate your head, shoulders, and hips to the right, then to the left.
- Thigh Stretch - Reach behind you and grab your ankle. Point your knee toward the ground as you pull your leg back to increase the stretch. Repeat with your other leg.
- Low Back Stretch/Squat - Slowly lower yourself into a squatting position and rest your body on your thighs.
- Backward Bend - Place your hands in the small of your back. Gently bend backwards at the low back until you feel an easy stretch.
- Side Bend - Place both arms behind or over your head. Lean toward the right, then toward the left.
- Neck Rotation - Keep your head upright and slowly turn it until you feel a stretch.

Remember, stretching should not hurt. If you are doing a stretch and feel pain, discontinue the stretch.