

Back Injuries

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Sixty to eighty percent of the population will suffer back pain or injury in their lifetime. Back injuries result from damage, wear, or trauma to the bones, muscles, or other tissues of the back. Common back injuries include sprains and strains, herniated disks, and fractured vertebrae. The lumbar is often the site of back pain. The area is susceptible because of its flexibility and the amount of body weight it regularly bears.

Low-back pain is often the result of incorrect lifting methods and posture. Repetitive lifting, bending, and twisting motions of the torso affect both the degree of severity and frequency of low-back pain. In addition, low-back pain may also be the result of bad lifting habits. Sedentary lifestyles most often lead to weak abdominal muscles and hamstrings, which means that you are less apt to draw strength from these areas when lifting and are therefore more likely to count on your back to overcompensate. This, obviously, can lead to injury.

Whenever you lift an object, the weight of that object creates pressure on your spine. If the object is held away from your body the pressure on the spine is increased. When you hold a 35-pound box twenty inches from your body you are putting approximately 600 pounds of pressure on your back. The closer you hold the box to your body the less pressure you put on your back. When you lift something, keep it as close to your body as possible.

We are able to bend our backs because of discs between the vertebrae. These discs are pinched in the direction of bending to allow flexibility, but discs are not intended to support 600 pounds of pinching from improper lifting. Eventually this increased stress on the discs will lead to what is commonly called a slipped disc, which occurs when the inside of the disc bulges through its outer casing (the annulus) and presses against the spinal cord.

Heavy lifting is not the only thing that can cause back problems. Any kind of work that puts stress on the back can be harmful. Even sitting has drawbacks. We exert fifty percent more pressure on our backs while sitting than while standing. Another fifty percent is added when we lean forward while sitting.

Repetitive motion is also often to blame for back injuries. If you lifted very light boxes from a cart to a shelf for an entire shift, the weight of the boxes might not hurt you, but the repetitive motion of the same muscles might. Twisting while you lift is another way to cause damage, especially with repetitive motion.

By using proper lifting techniques in combination with proper posture you can effectively prevent back problems.

- Test a load before lifting. Get help if it's too much for you to handle.
- Avoid twisting. Face the load and move your entire body while turning.
- Bend at the knees with feet spread. Lift the load between your knees instead of in front of them.
- Keep your back straight. Tighten stomach muscles and lift with your legs.
- Keep the load close to your body.
- Stand at attention: head up, back straight, stomach in, chest out.
- Support the lower back when sitting.

There are also several things you can do outside of work to help keep your back in good condition:

- Stay healthy. Exercise and eat nutritious meals.
- Try to maintain an ideal body weight. Carrying extra pounds adds unwanted stress to the back.
- Sit, stand, and lay with good posture. Align the ears, shoulders, and hips to support your spine.
- Avoid sleeping on your stomach or on a sagging mattress.
- Relax. Fatigue from worry tenses your muscles and can cause back spasms.