

# Manual Material Handling

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At least 400,000 employees in the U.S. suffer disabling back injuries each year. The resulting medical and workers' compensation bills are a huge drain on national and business resources. Anyone who has experienced a back injury, however, has more personal reasons for avoiding back injuries, namely, pain and possible long-range disability. Yet many materials must be moved by hand on the jobsite, which adds to the potential for a back injury. So, what's the answer?

There are two approaches that help reduce the risk of back and other injuries caused by overexertion. First, arrange the jobsite so that manual material handling is kept to a minimum. For example, store materials as near as possible to the area where they will be needed. Second, when materials must be moved by hand, keep some basic safety practices in mind to help reduce the likelihood of injury. Some of these practices are as follows:

- Think through the entire route the load must travel on site. Can the distance be shortened?
- Consider combining materials with other materials on a pallet and moving it with a forklift. Or, break the load down into smaller units to make moving easier.
- Size up the load before attempting to carry it. Test it for weight and stability.
- Make sure the path of travel is clean, dry and uncluttered.
- Get help from another person.
- Add handles to the load if possible.
- Always lift with your legs bent and back straight.
- Keep the load close to your body to reduce the stress put on your back.
- Avoid twisting your body.
- Plan for changes in speed or direction during the lift. Avoid quick or sudden motions.
- Minimize the frequency of lifts during a workday. Avoid overexertion and give your body a chance to recover.