

Safety News

Watch Your Back!

Back problems can gradually sneak up on you. When you are young and strong, you may think you can lift anything, but years of improper lifting can take a toll on the spine. Eventually, one wrong move can cause permanent damage.

There can be many reasons for back pain including poor lifting techniques, over-exertion, injury, posture, overweight, lack of exercise, weak stomach muscles, and age. However, by practicing the proper safety techniques, you can prevent or eliminate back pain.

If you are having back pain, check with your doctor to find out if there is a medical problem. The next step in tracking down the cause of back pain is to look at how you are lifting.

- ◆ To protect your back against injury, learn and use proper lifting techniques. Your legs should be bent, keeping the back's natural curve (bottom thrust out), while lifting *reasonable* loads. Never bend or twist while lifting.
- ◆ The number one cause of on-the-job injuries is physical overload. These injuries are caused by lifting (too heavy a load or lifting improperly), straining, overreaching, bending, and twisting. Whenever possible, use a mechanical aid, or get help with the load from another worker.
- ◆ How is your posture? Poor posture stresses the back. When standing, sitting, or driving, do you slump?
- ◆ How fit are you? A sedentary life adds to back pain because the stomach muscles become weak. You need strong muscles to help support the spine, so exercise regularly.
- ◆ Watch your weight? Extra weight, especially in the stomach, pulls the center of balance off and stresses your back.

Minor pack pain may be eased or eliminated by taking some of these simple precautions.

Remember, your back is not the culprit. Your lifting technique, fitness, and posture affect how your back feels. If you take good care of a car, it will last a long time before you replace it. You will never be able to replace your back, but with good care, it will last a long time.

Source: Judy Kerry, State Compensation Insurance Fund

