

Safe Lifting Techniques

Lifting and handling materials are common tasks in the workplace; however, more than 700 back-related injuries occur every day due to improper techniques. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are more than 269,000 back injuries every year in private industry alone. Back injuries account for more than 25% of all lost-time injuries.

Proper lifting and handling techniques protect against injuries and make tasks easier. There are four basic steps in this process, and each step has basic principles one must remember to effectively reduce serious injury:



1. Planning

- Assess the size of the load to ensure it's not too heavy or bulky.
- If the load is too large, ask for help.
- Check your route to make sure it's free of obstructions and obstacles.
- Obtain proper protective equipment (i.e., gloves, safety shoes, back belt)
- Use handcars, hoists, and mechanical lifting devices when possible.
- Check the load for hazards like nails, splinters, and rough edges.

2. Lifting

- Get as close to the load as possible.
- Maintain a firm footing.
- Keep your feet shoulder-width apart and maintain balance.
- Keep your back straight and your stomach muscles tight.
- Bend at the knees and lift with your legs.
- Lift slowly and in a smooth motion.
- Don't twist. When turning, use your whole body and shift your feet first.

3. Carrying

- Hold the load close to your body.
- Watch where you're walking and never carry something that obstructs your view.
- Move your feet to make turns; don't twist.
- Maintain a straight back and tight stomach muscles.
- Use extra care when ascending and descending stairs.

4. Lowering

- Keep the load close to your body and avoid bending your back.
- Squat down, bending at your knees with a straight back.
- Don't stretch or over reach. Place the object down, then slide it in place.
- Keep your fingers and toes from underneath the load.

Stretching, loosening up, and good physical condition also help keep the weight off your spine. It doesn't take much to injure your back, and following these basic principles will help you minimize your risk and make your job easier.