

Minimizing The Risk of Back Injury

IDENTIFY

Almost everyone will experience back pain at some point in their lives. It varies from one person to the next, ranges from mild to severe, and can be short-lived or long-lasting.

In most cases, back pain is not the result of a serious injury or illness. The most common causes are strains and cramps in the back muscles.

Back pain also can result from tears in the tendons connecting the back muscles to the spine, or from sprains and tears in the ligaments interconnecting the vertebrae (bones in the spine). Less frequently, it arises from direct damage to the vertebrae or the discs that separate them.

Normal wear and tear on the spine that goes along with aging cannot be avoided, but there are things that can be done to lessen the impact of back problems.

Several factors can contribute to back pain at work. Among them:

- Exerting too much force on the back such as lifting or moving heavy objects
- Repeating certain motions that can lead to muscle fatigue or injury
- Certain medical conditions and lifestyle factors, such as obesity, sleeping position, poor physical condition, smoking, and stress

Surgery is rarely required for back pain. X-ray, CT, or MRI scans typically are not needed to understand back pain. They can be useful if someone is considering surgery, but clinical examination is the best step to decide if surgery might be required.

COMMUNICATE AND CONTROL

STAY ACTIVE - INCLUDE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

Maintaining a healthy weight minimizes stress on your back. For most healthy adults, experts recommend either, 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity, combined with strength training and stretching at least twice a week. Exercise alone may not always be enough to maintain a healthy weight. A proper diet plays a big role in overall weight and physical health.

PAY ATTENTION TO POSTURE

When standing, keep your weight balanced over both of your feet. Don't slouch. Proper footwear plays a big part in back health as well as overall posture. If necessary, use insoles that properly support your feet and ankle to help maintain good posture and stay comfortable throughout the work day.

You will spend roughly one third of your life in your shoes! Make sure they are the right pair for you. Getting fitted or consulting a specialist is recommended, especially for individuals who are on their feet all day.

LIFT PROPERLY

When lifting a heavy object, do so with your legs, keeping your feet wide, back straight, and abdominal muscles tight. Hold the object close to your body. Avoid twisting your waist. Your shoulders, hips, and knees should all be parallel to each other. Where necessary, get assistance with large, awkward, or very heavy objects.

MODIFY REPETITIVE TASKS

Use lifting devices, when available, to help you lift a load. Try to alternate physically demanding tasks with less demanding ones. Timed job rotations are recommended. You may feel fine and want to continue, but rotate anyways - your back will thank you!

SET UP YOUR WORK AREA APPROPRIATELY

When using ladders, make sure you are not over reaching above, to the side, or behind your head/body. If what you are working on/with can be elevated to waist height, do so. Avoid bending over for long periods of time to perform work. Take appropriate breaks. Breaks don't have to be a complete removal from work. Where possible, perform different tasks back to back rather than batching all of your similar tasks together.

Use the right tool for the job. Ergonomic tools and equipment can not only help you perform a task safely, but quicker and more efficiently as well. Consider investing in tools and equipment for tasks that are performed frequently.

THE QUIZ:

Minimizing The Risk Of Back Injury

Answers are at the bottom of the page. Present these questions to attendees and have them answer as a group. Have a discussion to ensure everyone understands the risks and how to control them.

1. Back pain is caused most often by serious injuries.

TRUE _____ FALSE _____

2. Back pain is typically damage to the muscles and ligaments connected to the bones of the spine.

TRUE _____ FALSE _____

3. Which of these are factors that can contribute to back pain at work?

- A) Exerting too much force when lifting or moving objects
- B) Constantly repeating certain motions
- C) Poor physical health/condition
- D) All of the above

3. Fill in the blanks.

1. Lift with your _____ and not with your _____.
2. Bend your _____ and keep the object _____ to the body.
3. Keep your _____, _____, and _____ parallel to each other when lifting.

4. When setting up your work area, which of the following are recommended practices?

- A) Position yourself so you do not have to over reach
- B) Position your work in front of you, not to the side or over your head
- C) Were possible, avoid batching work, change tasks regularly to avoid strain or fatigue
- D) All of the above

5. List the tasks or types of work that present a risk of back injury on site

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____

Facts & Tips

During an episode of back pain, what you do early on is very important. If you feel discomfort or fatigue, stop what you are doing! This is your body telling you there is a problem.

Use ice for swelling and bruising. Use heat for stiffness, aches, and pains. DO NOT apply heat or cold for more than 20 minutes at a time.

As pain subsides and mobility increases:

- Stretch gently
- Walk around for short distances
 - Go farther as mobility increases
- Maintain a balanced posture and support yourself when getting up or sitting down

For back pain that lasts more than a couple of days, consult a Doctor.

ALWAYS REPORT INJURIES TO YOUR EMPLOYER IMMEDIATELY. Even if you still feel capable of working, notify your employer of your sore back or injury and make sure it is documented.

ANSWERS
1. FALSE 2. TRUE 3. Legs, back / Knees, close / Knees, waist, shoulders 4. D 5. Make list as a group



FOR THE RECORD

Date of Meeting: _____

Location: _____ Start time: _____ Finish Time: _____

Topic: _____ Meeting Leader: _____

In attendance (please print):

Contact your Construction Safety Association for even more *Practical Solutions for a Safer Workplace*

Follow us on Social Media, visit our website at constructionsafety.ca, or give us a call for more tools, resources and information.

WINNIPEG OFFICE
1447 Waverley Street
Winnipeg, MB R3T 0P7
T: 204-775-3171
F: 204-779-3505

BRANDON OFFICE
950-10th Street
Brandon, MB R7A 6B5
T: 204-728-3456
F: 204-571-0678

