



Manual Material Handling: Tips to Prevent a Lifting Injury

An injury to your back is easier to prevent than it is to cure. The following tips will help you to keep your back healthy and injury free.

When lifting:

- Prepare for the lift – know how much you're lifting and where you're moving it to
- Plan your route – be sure doorways are open and tripping hazards are avoided
- Stand close to the object – feet shoulder width apart with one leg slightly in front of the other
- Bend at your knees and keep your back in a natural “S-Curve” position
- Set your grip – be sure that you have a secure handle on the object
- Keep your abdominal muscles tight
- Lift the load slowly
- When changing directions, pivot your feet. Do not twist
- Set the object down the same way that you picked it up

Minimize the weight of the object that you are lifting. Break the load in half, ask a co-worker for help, or use equipment for assistance (i.e. cart, lifts, and wheelbarrows).

The optimal zone for heavy lifting is between thigh and waist level. Try not to store heavy items too low or too high.

Avoid reaching when lifting a heavy object and/or repeating the action several times. Heavy lifting when combined with awkward postures and/or repetition will increase your risk for injury.

Take stretch breaks during the work day to allow your muscles to recover. The stretch should be relaxed, slow, controlled, and should not hurt.

Get fit! A fit body is better equipped to protect your hard working back. A fitness program should include elements of muscle (and core) strengthening, cardiovascular training, stretching, and balance and stability training. Consult your health care professional before beginning an exercise program.

Please contact Occupational Health and Wellness with any questions regarding this handout or to request an ergonomic assessment, job specific training, or training for your department. OHW can be reached at ext. 52647 or ohw@uoguelph.ca