

Your back is a finely tuned machine

One, two, three ... arrrgh! And another one, two, three ... arrrgh! And another back is strained because a worker didn't adhere to the approved method of lifting.

This is such a common event that training is regularly given on the appropriate way to lift and carry a load, and yet workers continue to be injured. Muscles or ligaments are strained, torn, or sprained. Injuries to the back result in literally millions of manhours lost from work annually.

Your back is a finely tuned organic machine comprised of bone, ligaments, and muscles that perform flawlessly over our lives. We take it for granted until we injure it.

When injured, however, this marvellous organic machine can cause horrendous, debilitating pain and become a collapsing scaffold.

Our backs perform without a murmur of protest as we go through our various job activities. Movements such as sitting, standing, kneeling, and even lying prone on the floor require your back to perform. It only takes one small sprain for you to notice just how much you use your back.

Back injuries and difficulties are the primary injury that happens on the job. Companies must pay out thousands in workman's compensation losses for each back injury claim.

Workers pay out in terms of reduced or lost wages, emotional distress, and physical pain that can linger for years or even for the rest of the worker's life. Is it really worth the aggravation of injuring your back just because you don't want to spend less than a second to properly adjust your posture?

Some of the wrong ways to lift are:

- not bending your knees
- positioning your feet wrong
- having an improper grip
- having your weight not properly centered

To help avoid back injury

- **Maintain good physical conditioning**
Ask your doctor for some exercises that will help you keep your muscles strong and properly toned.

■ Investigate the item you will be lifting

If it seems too large or weighs too much for you to properly lift, then ask for help. Many workers hesitate to ask for help because they fear that others will think they are weak or lazy.

Don't allow this mindset to cloud your judgment. If the load is heavier than around 40 pounds, if one end is heavier than the other, if it is awkwardly shaped or difficult to manage by yourself, then **don't**. Ask a co-worker for help.

The right way to lift

Place one foot alongside the load to be lifted and one foot slightly to the rear of the load. The back foot will be positioned to provide the upward thrust that the lift will require. The body should be positioned close to the object.

Keep arms and elbows close to the body to help keep the weight centered. Using a palm grip, grasp a lower front corner and opposite upper back corner with your fingers and hand placed around the corners.

Using a squatting position, keeping your back straight (not straight up but in a straight line), tuck your chin in to your chest to help maintain the straight line of your spine. Begin the lift by straightening your legs and thrusting with the rear foot. You should feel the strain in your legs, not your back.

Continued on back



Lifting tips

- Keep your feet about shoulder width apart to help keep you stable.
- Your knees should be bent, not your back.
- Don't twist or reach over too far. Don't "jerk" the load to lift it. Keep your lower back rolled inward and your abdomen muscles tight.
- Use safety equipment such as back belts or material handling equipment if you need them and if you are properly trained to use them.
- Keep a snug grip on the load. Never use a pinch grip. Use the entire hand to spread the weight.
- Properly support your back.
- Ensure that you sit up straight and don't slump when you walk or sit. Your back will be stronger if you practice good posture.

Remember

- The discs which separate each vertebra are essential for pain-free operation of your back. A disc can become pinched by improper lifting.
- Your back is susceptible to injuries such as hernias, sprains, or strains.
- Once your back is injured the first time, it is more likely to be injured again.

Points to ponder

- Have you ever lifted large or weighty loads quickly without paying attention to how you are performing the task?
- Do you stay in shape by exercising and keep your muscles toned?
- Do you have an annual physical?
- Do you have coworkers, other team members, or material handling aids to assist you in moving large, awkward or weighty loads?

Information contained in this publication was obtained from sources believed to be reliable. State Auto Insurance makes no representations or guarantee as to the correctness or sufficiency of any information contained herein, nor guarantees results based upon use of this information. State Auto Insurance disclaims all warranties expressed or implied regarding merchantability, fitness for use and fitness for a particular purpose. State Auto Insurance does not warrant that reliance upon this document will prevent accident and losses or satisfy federal, state and local codes, ordinances and regulations. The reader assumes entire risk as to use of this information. Further, this document does not amend, or otherwise affect the terms, conditions or coverage of any insurance policy issued by State Auto Insurance.