

Protect Your Back

by
State Compensation Insurance Fund

Although repeated manual lifting of heavy materials is the single most common cause of back injury, it can result from simple tasks if done in awkward positions. Think about how you work and move correctly to protect your back. You'll be able to work longer and more comfortably.

Position yourself as close to your work as possible. There's less strain on your back if the work is between your shoulders and knees, with a waist-high level being the most comfortable. You may need to raise or lower yourself with a stool or ladder for better positioning. Avoid over-reaching and when reaching down, put one hand on your thigh to support your back.

You can strain your back if you work in an awkward or twisted position or if you bend and use your back for support rather than your leg muscles. Bend your knees and squat down to get closer to the work if it's below your waist. If you must squat for a long time, alternate kneeling down on one knee to transfer the load off your legs and back or sit on a stool or crate.

Before lifting, consider the weight, size, and shape of the load. Face the object directly and move close to it. Bend your knees and grasp the object with your whole hand. Tuck in your elbows and arms while keeping your body weight centered and your back straight. Tuck in your chin to straighten your spine and neck. Lift by straightening your legs in a smooth, continuous movement; avoid jerking and twisting. If you must lift above your waist level, reposition your grip to keep the weight centered. To lower a load, reverse the procedure. If you're not sure you can handle a load, get help from another worker or a mechanical lift. But remember, equipment can put strain on your body if you push or pull it incorrectly.

Over-exertion, previous injury, bad posture, overweight, lack of exercise, lax stomach muscles, and age can increase your chance of back injury. So, keep yourself in good physical condition. Get proper rest, eat healthy, drink plenty of water, and do some warm-up stretches before work. ••