Proper lifting techniques to help workers avoid injury.

On-the-job lifting is a routine practice for people in many industries, yet workers often get hurt when it’s not done properly. In fact, back disorders are a leading cause of disability in the U.S., afflicting nearly 600,000 employees each year at a cost of about $50 billion. Safe lifting is always important—even with small objects. It doesn’t take a heavy load to cause a strain that can result in a worker requiring time off.

What’s the risk to your business?

Without the right ergonomic training, lifting can lead to back injuries and the negative consequences that often come with them. These include workers’ compensation claims, lost production time, costs to replace injured workers, plus the danger of injured employees developing long-term conditions. By sharing the following lifting safety tips with your staff, you can help them avoid painful and costly injuries.

How to prepare before you lift.

You can’t always avoid lifting on the job, but you should carefully evaluate any object before trying to lift it. Here’s what you can do:

- Size up the object to determine if weight and size will affect how it should be lifted
- Be sure you can lift, carry and place the item where it belongs
- Clear the path from the object to where it will be placed
- Check the material for nails, splinters and other hazards
- Wear gloves and safety shoes, if appropriate
- Ask for help if the object is too heavy or bulky, or if you can’t see around what you’re attempting to carry

Things to remember while lifting and transporting.

- Avoid lifting from the floor, if possible; lifting from the floor more than doubles the amount of force on your lower back when compared with lifting from waist height
- Get a firm footing; keep your feet shoulder-width apart with one foot in front of the other for good balance

Grip firmly with your whole hand, not just your fingers

Keep the load close; your back muscles must work harder to counterbalance an object’s weight when it’s farther away from your body

Squat down, bending at the hips and knees

Keep your back in its neutral or straight position; your back should be straight, but not rigid

Tighten stomach muscles to help keep your back in balance

Lift up objects primarily by straightening your legs and slightly unbending your back

Stand slowly, without jerking upward

Change direction only with your feet; don’t twist your body

Watch your fingers, hands and feet in tight places

Place the load at a location that is waist high to avoid bending; when placing on a shelf, set it on the front of the shelf and push it into place

Additional tips when moving large objects.

Whenever possible, use a cart, hand truck or other mechanical device instead of lifting on your own, especially when the object you’re moving is large

When you move large items manually, reduce the strain on your back by pushing them

- Keep one foot behind the other and your weight balanced between them, and keep your back straight and vertical to the ground
- To maintain this position more easily, keep your head up and look straight ahead
- Use the force of your legs and arms to assist you

Do not attempt to drag an object behind you, which can strain your shoulders and neck, as well as your back

Lifting from the floor should be avoided, if possible. However, when necessary, the worker picking up the object should always squat down, bending at the hips and knees.