

BACK SAFETY



*How to prevent a lifetime
of back problems!*

HOSPICE
& COMMUNITY CARE
founded as Hospice of Lancaster County

BACK INJURIES...

- More than 1 million workers suffer back injuries each year, accounting for 1/5 of all workplace injuries or illnesses.
- One fourth of all compensation claims involve back injuries, which cost employers billions of dollars.
- Add to that the employees' pain and suffering...

BACK INJURIES...

- They are exceedingly painful, difficult to heal, and have an effect on everything you do.
- After suffering one back injury, you are much more likely to experience another one later on.
- It is important to learn how to avoid injuring or re-injuring your back.

ABOUT YOUR SPINE



- The spine's vertebrae are held together by ligaments.
- Muscles are attached to the vertebrae by bands of tissue called tendons.
- Between each vertebra is a cushion known as a disc.

ABOUT YOUR SPINE

- Openings in each vertebra line up to form a long, hollow canal.
- The spinal cord runs through this canal from the base of the brain.
- Nerves from the spinal cord branch out and leave the spine through the spaces between the vertebra.

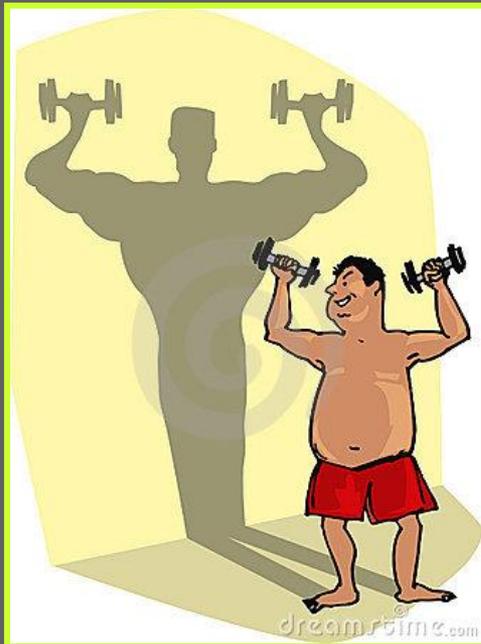
WHY DO BACK INJURIES OCCUR?

- The lower part of the back holds most of the body's weight.
- Every time you bend over, lift a heavy object, or sit leaning forward, you put stress on your spine.
- Over time, the discs between your vertebrae can start to wear out and become damaged.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Read the following slides to learn about contributing factors in back injuries

POOR PHYSICAL CONDITION



Your stomach muscles provide a lot of the support needed by your back. If you have weak, flabby stomach muscles, your back may not get all the support it needs, especially when you're lifting or carrying heavy objects.

POOR POSTURE

When your mother told you to sit and stand up straight, she was giving you good advice. It is best to try to maintain the back in its natural "S" shaped curve. You want to avoid leaning forward (unsupported) when you sit, or hunching over while you're standing.



EXTRA WEIGHT

The more you weigh, the more stress it puts on your back every time you bend over. That pot belly is not helping the health of your back.



STRESS

Tense muscles are more susceptible to strains and spasms.



OVERDOING IT



Don't be afraid to say, "This is too heavy for me to lift alone." It's important to recognize your physical limitations and abilities. Many people have injured their backs because they were afraid to ask for help.

COMMON CAUSES OF BACK INJURIES

- Many back injuries tend to be the result of cumulative damage suffered over a long period of time.
- Certain actions, motions and movements are more likely than others to cause or contribute to back injuries.
- Any time you find yourself doing one of these things, you should think:

DANGER! My back is at risk!



COMMON CAUSES...

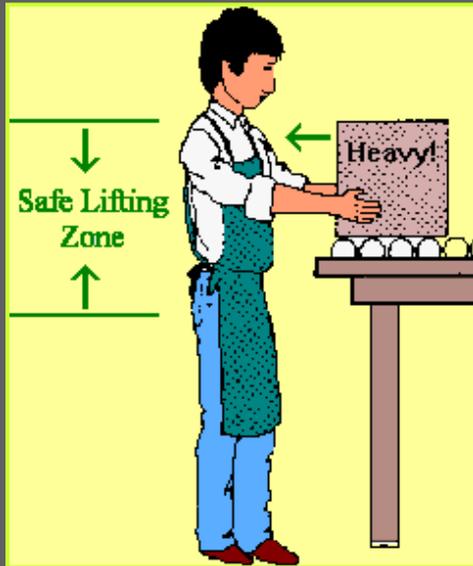
- **Heavy Lifting** - especially repetitive lifting over a long period of time
- **Twisting at the waist** - while lifting or holding a heavy load
- **Reaching and lifting** - over your head, across a table, or out the back of a truck
- **Lifting or carrying objects with awkward or odd shapes**
- **Working in odd, uncomfortable positions** - gardening, kneeling, tasks that require you to bend over for long periods of time
- **Sitting or standing too long** in one position - sitting can be very hard on the lower back
- **Walking and slipping** on a wet floor or ice
- **Sleeping in a bad position**, or because the mattress is too soft

PREVENT BACK INJURIES

- The best way to prevent back injuries is to develop habits that reduce the strain placed on the back.
- There are some basic things you can do to help.

PREVENT BACK INJURIES

Avoid lifting and bending whenever you can.



- Place objects up off the floor.
- That way you won't have to reach down to pick them up again.
- Raise / lower shelves.
- The best zone for lifting is between your shoulders and your waist.
- Put heavier objects on shelves at waist level, lighter objects on lower or higher shelves.
- Use carts and dollies to move objects, instead of carrying them yourself.

PREVENT BACK INJURIES



Which is better for your back - **pushing** a cart or **pulling** a cart?

It is **better to push** a cart, dolly, lawnmower, wheelbarrow, etc. than it is to pull it. However, if you do have to pull it, consciously force yourself to tighten your stomach muscles and try to maintain good body posture.

Use cranes, hoists, lift tables, and other lift-assist devices whenever you can.

PREVENT BACK INJURIES

Use proper lifting procedures.

- Bending your knees keeps your spine in a better alignment.
- Instead of using your back like a crane, let your legs do the work.

FOLLOW THIS PROCEDURE WHEN LIFTING

1. Take a balanced stance with your feet about a shoulder-width apart. One foot can be behind the object and the other next to it.
2. Squat down to lift the object, but keep your heels off the floor. Get as close to the object as you can.
3. Use your palms (not just your fingers) to get a secure grip on the load. Make sure you'll be able to maintain a hold on the object without switching your grip later.
4. Lift gradually (without jerking) using your leg, abdominal and buttock muscles and keeping the load as close to you as possible. Keep your chin tucked in so as to keep a relatively straight back and neck line.
5. Once you're standing, change directions by pointing your feet in the direction you want to go and turning your whole body. Avoid twisting at your waist while carrying a load.
6. When you put a load down, use these same guidelines in reverse.

LIFTING TIPS

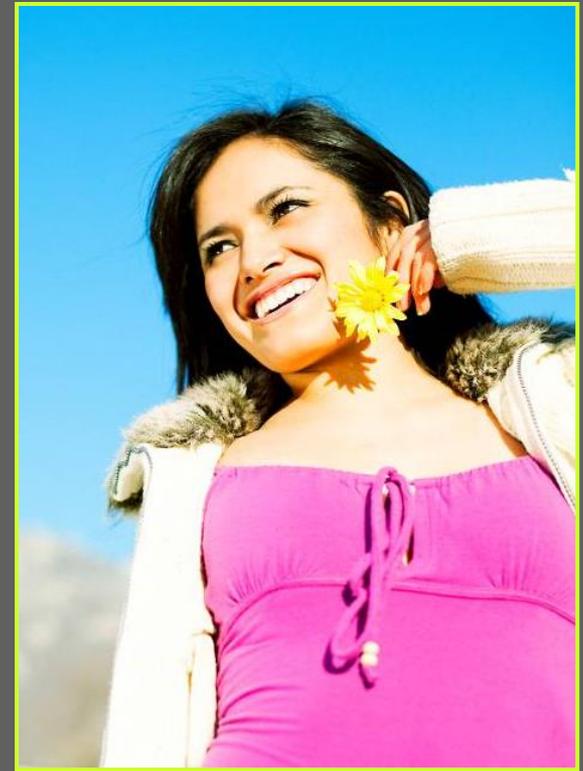
- Reduce the amount of weight lifted. If you're moving a bunch of books, better to load several small boxes than one extremely heavy load.
- Use handles and lifting straps.
- **Get help** if the shape is too awkward or the object is too heavy for you to lift and move by yourself!

Manage Your Body

It's important to know your body's limitations, and it's important to be aware of your body position at all times.

Learn to recognize those situations where your back is most at risk: bending, lifting, reaching, twisting, etc.

Then take measures to avoid an injury.



REMEMBER TO...

Stretch first - If you know that you're going to be doing work that might be hard on your back, take the time to stretch your muscles before starting, just like a professional athlete would do before a workout.

Slow down - If you're doing a lot of heavy, repetitive lifting, take it slowly if you can.

Rest your back - Take frequent, short (micro) breaks. Taking a one minute stretch break every now and then can help you avoid feeling stiff and sore.

Sleep on a firm mattress - The best sleeping position for many people is either on the back with the knees slightly elevated (by a pillow), or on the side with knees slightly bent.

Get in shape - Strengthen your stomach muscles, lose a little weight, increase your flexibility.