Steer Clear of Heavy Lifting



Safety Talk

Look for ways to avoid lifting. This doesn’t mean you should hide in the storeroom when something needs to be lifted. It means you should try to come up with strategies for getting your work done without heavy lifting.

How do you do that? One way is to examine your work routines to see how to do things differently. For instance, instead of picking up items from a pallet at floor level, could the items be stored at waist height? Could supplies be purchased in bulk form and moved by conveyor instead of manually handled bags?

Lifting equipment is available for countless applications. Operated by electricity, springs, hydraulics, air pressure and other energy sources, lifting equipment takes the weight and requires the operator only to control and direct the work. A hydraulic gate on a truck, a chain hoist, an inflatable lift bag, a spring-loaded platform and a workbench that can be raised or lowered with electric controls are examples of such lifting equipment. Could your tasks be done more safely with such equipment? Talk to your supervisor if you have ideas for improvements.

Even in an office setting, lifting can cause severe back injuries. You should use a handcart to move furniture and cartons of stationery. Find a spot at waist level for the box of paper usually kept on the floor next to the printer or copier.

Caregivers, whether employed in a healthcare facility or helping a family member, are at risk for back injury from lifting and positioning patients. Lift devices are seeing increased use in both occupational and home settings.

If you have lifting equipment available, use it. Take the time to grab a handcart or a pallet jack instead of moving something manually. Use the portable or stationary patient lift devices every time.

Back injuries are the leading cause of lost days from work. These injuries occur both on the job and off. Some serious back injuries happen all at once, but many seem to be the result of accumulated small injuries caused by lifting too much weight and lifting from awkward postures.

The correct way to lift manually is to crouch down close to the item, get a firm grip, and lift using the strength in your legs—not your back.

Better yet, get some help. Have another person assist you, or use a lifting device.

It’s also important to maintain your general health to help prevent back injuries.

Keeping a healthy weight, getting enough sleep, rest and exercise, and managing stress help keep your back strong and flexible. Maintain good posture when you stand or sit, and avoid straining your back whatever you are doing.

Use your head to save your back by devising strategies to avoid heavy and awkward lifting.