



Back Injury Prevention Program Basics

You or any of your workers can suffer a debilitating, costly back injury. This sheet shows a few basic ideas to help reduce your likelihood of back injury & its costs & downtime. Your local chapter of the National Safety Council, OSHA, & perhaps a local chiropractor or other health care professional can provide greater detail to satisfy more specific needs.

Back injury causes include poor posture; stressful working conditions; diminished body flexibility due to aging; pushing, lifting, pulling, & moving objects; repeated lifting of awkward items; poor job station design; excess reaching or twisting; bending when lifting; bent posture when standing still; sitting in vibrating places (e.g. inside vehicles); lifting heavy items, lifting with forceful motions; & improper lifting techniques.

Items that contribute to back injury include fatigue, existing spinal defects or injury, aging work force, use of vibrating & pneumatic tools, increased use of assembly line practices including increasing the line speed.

Basics of preventing back injuries include:

- Review tasks & confer with workers to identify bending, lifting, & other hazards that may cause back injury & to identify ways to modify them to eliminate or minimize the hazards
- Modify tasks (e.g. reduce weight of items to be lifted; store items to be lifted between knee & shoulder height instead of on the floor; store items in tiltable bins so workers do not have to bend; provide adjustable height workbenches so workers do not have to stoop)
- Store heavy items at waist height
- Arrange workstations to minimize bending, twisting, reaching, & pulling (pushing causes less exertion)
- Provide floormats, footrests or rails upon which workers who must stand in place may place a foot in order to change position & rest the back (e.g. cashiers)
- Provide adjustable chairs or stools & arrange workstations so workers may change position (e.g. clerical workers)
- Provide conveyors, rollers, & other moving aids
- Make items as small as possible so they will not be awkward to move
- Train workers in safe lifting & moving of materials
- Require workers to take frequent breaks
- Provide additional workers to minimize the lifting each does
- Require workers to use hand trucks & other lifting aids & to seek assistance if needed
- Schedule tasks so no one works an entire shift making the same movements
- Instruct supervisors/foremen to enforce safe lifting/handling techniques
- Consider medical screening of prospective employees to whom you have offered a job (e.g. flexibility & strength testing; review medical history; spinal X-rays; employment physicals); consult with your attorney regarding Americans with Disabilities Act requirements
- Consider contracting with a “back school” service that teaches workers back anatomy & physiology; moving, carrying, pushing, pulling, & lifting methods; back exercises to limber & build strength; & rehabilitation of injured workers
- Analyze back injury reports to determine root causes (e.g. worker did not know safe lifting techniques; worker carried heavy item because freight carrier delivered load to the wrong dock; worker felt embarrassed to ask for assistance) & take corrective actions
- Analyze back injury records to determine effectiveness of your prevention efforts; modify efforts as needed