

PREVENT BACK INJURIES



irwin siegel agency, inc.
risk management services



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PREVENT BACK INJURIES

INTRODUCTION

OSHA considers back injuries to be the nation's number one workplace safety problem. More than one million workers suffer back injuries each year. That accounts for 20% of all workplace injuries or illnesses. One fourth of all compensation claims involve back injuries and costs employers billions of dollars. According to the national center for health statistics, back injuries are the second most common reason for doctor visits among U.S. citizens.



CAUSES OF BACK INJURIES

There are many reasons back injuries occur. Some of the most common causes are:

- 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, or across a table
- Working in odd, uncomfortable positions; for example, 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
- Slips, trips and falls

Frontline workers in the human services field are at great risk for back injuries. The individuals you support have varying needs based on their abilities. Even if you work with individuals who ambulate independently, you are probably assisting them with activities of daily living such as dressing, bathing, showering, mealtime, etc. These are all tasks done on a daily basis and can cause strain on your back.

What about individuals who need moderate assistance? Do you support a person who has an unsteady gait, or an individual who experiences severe drop seizures? Taking your back's health for granted while carrying out the duties of your job can cause serious injury.



YOUR BACK: THE NUTS & BOLTS

WHAT DOES YOUR BACK DO FOR YOU?

- Holds you up
- Supports the weight of your trunk
- Keeps your head up
- Lets you move easily

HOW DOES YOUR BACK DO THESE THINGS FOR YOU?

- Your back is made up of 24 moveable bones called vertebrae. These are all stacked one on top of the other.
- Between each vertebra are shock absorbing cushions called discs
- Ligaments (bands of sturdy tissue) hold the vertebrae in place

- Vertebrae join at the bottom of your spine forming a base. This holds up the rest of your body
- Tendons attach muscles directly to the vertebrae and keep your back stable, hold good posture, and enable you to move around.

TWO COMMON TYPES OF BACK INJURIES

- Soft tissue injuries involving muscles or ligaments
- Injuries to the discs

SIGNS OF INJURY

Your body will let you know when your back is becoming strained. Do yourself a favor and don't ignore it. Your body will not lie to you! Pay attention to the first aches and pains you feel. Don't brush off:

- Aching
- Sharp or dull pain
- Pain that comes and goes
- Hot, inflamed feeling
- Tingling/numbness
- Stiffness
- Unusual muscle weakness and fatigue
- Pain when attempting to assume normal posture
- Decreased range of motion
- Pain when standing or rising from a seated position



PREVENTION

The best treatment for a back injury is to prevent one from happening. Take steps to protect your delicate spine and muscles.

SAFE LIFTING

Your job requires you to do some heavy lifting. Whether you're lifting an object, or an individual you are supporting, it is important to do so safely.

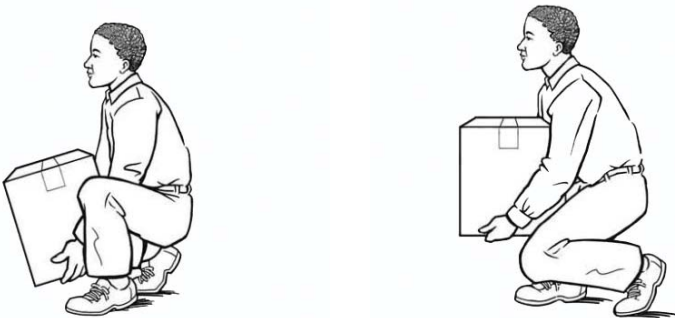
Assess the load. Ask yourself:

- Is mechanical help needed and/or available?
- Can I lift this alone?
- Can I divide the load to make it lighter?

Assess your surrounding environment. Ask yourself:

- Is the path clear?
- Is my footing firm?
- What is my destination? Is there a place to set something down?

****** If you are assisting someone, make sure the person is ready for your assistance. Whenever possible, position yourself in a manner that prevents you from having to lean or reach across someone. Approach from the side rather than from the front. If another staff is helping you, make sure you are communicating with each other. Lift on a signal that is predetermined.



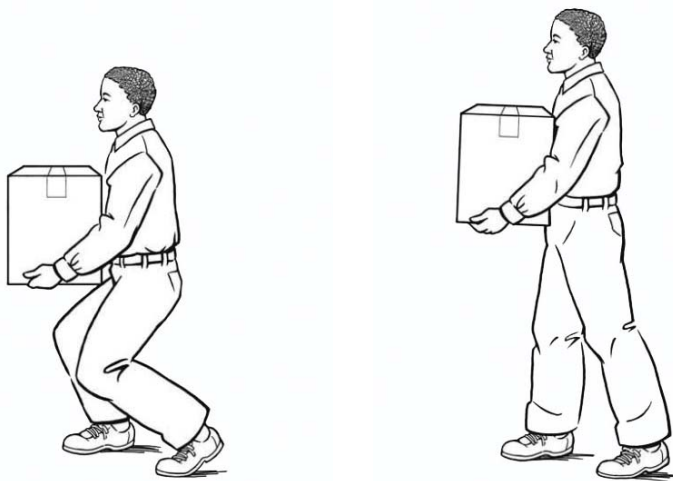
Prepare your lift

- Tuck your pelvis by tightening your stomach muscles. This will help keep your back in balance when you lift. Tucking your chin also helps you remember to keep your back straight.
- Stand close to the load with your feet shoulder-width apart. Using a wide stance helps to keep your back straight.
- Squat down and bend at the hip and knee. This helps keep your center of balance and allows the strong muscles to do the lifting. Do not bend at the waist or back.
- Hug the load. Keep your arms and elbows close to your body. Holding the object close to you puts less pressure on your body.
- Slowly lift by straightening your legs. Avoid twisting which can overload your spine and lead to injury. Make sure your feet, knees and torso are pointed in the same direction while lifting.
- Remember to breath. If you feel you have to hold your breath, the object you are lifting is too heavy.

Reverse these steps to put down the load.

- Bend your knees and not your back.
- Carefully set down the load.
- Do not twist.

Remember, the best lifting technique won't always work when you are lifting a person. If an individual is confused or uncooperative it can be difficult to hold him/her in the proper position for lifting and/or transferring. Unfortunately, circumstances are rarely perfect in your line of work. An individual can easily fall, slip or jerk when you least expect it, and you can be thrown off balance by the shift in weight. The best thing you can do to ensure your safety and the safety of the person you are supporting is to perform these tasks properly to the best of your ability, and to always seek help when you need it.



ERGONOMICS

An ergonomic program can help prevent back strain and injuries. The definition of ergonomics is the science of work and study of how people and jobs fit together. Basically, ergonomics is a way to adapt your working environment to cause less strain and prevent injuries. Ergonomics includes:

- Using equipment that is easy to use, for example using a mechanical lift instead of lifting something manually
- Organizing tasks in new ways – storing items you use daily on a shelf that is easily reached, rather than on the floor or above your shoulders
- Changing how tasks are done – instead of lifting or transferring an individual by yourself, always have another staff help.

Ergonomics is an important part of preventing back injuries because it can help identify which tasks put you at greater risk for injury, and how to do the task in a safer way.

SHOES

Wearing proper footwear will also help prevent a back injury. Good shoes will help maintain your balance and protect your feet and toes from injury.

- Avoid high heels
- Wear shoes that fit – shoes that are too big can get caught on flooring and cause you to trip. Shoes that are too small can cramp feet and reduce balance.
- Wear sturdy, rubber-soled closed toe shoes or sneakers. These will provide traction and support.
- Open toed shoes and high heels present a higher risk of injury as they can throw you off balance and strain your back.

EXERCISE & NUTRITION

Exercising 30 minutes a day can raise your heart rate and burn enough calories to help you maintain a healthy weight. Eating the right types of food also plays an important roll in staying healthy. Carrying around extra pounds puts tremendous strain on your back. Being overweight creates risk of injury when lifting even a very small load.

We also lose flexibility as we age. Without flexibility, we lose our body's full range of motion. Take stretch breaks between long standing or sitting periods to improve circulation and prevent back strain.

When your back is strong and healthy, you will recover from an injury more quickly. Remember, an exercise program can only reduce back injuries if it is part of an over-all back injury prevention program.

Preventing back injuries is a team effort. You, your management and the rest of your coworkers all have a role in creating a safe work environment.

WHAT TO DO

Management should:

- Provide a safe and healthy workplace
- Prevent known hazards to the best of their ability
- Maintain adequate staffing levels
- Implement an injury prevention program
- Effectively train staff

You should:

- Work with your coworkers to prevent unsafe conditions
- Listen to your body and report the first signs of back pain
- Take the best care possible of your health
- Report anything that could pose a hazard

It is important to know your limits when carrying out your job duties. A back injury can create long term disability; taking you away from the workforce. Doing all you can to prevent an injury is your best defense.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

OSHA has a resource library with pamphlets, booklets and other safety information (www.osha.gov)

The National Institute for Occupation Safety and Health (NIOSH) researches workplace health and safety issues. They have a toll-free number were you can ask for information on many hazards. Call: 1-800-356-4674.

Other government agencies such as your state OSHA, health departments, environmental protection agencies, and state and local fire departments may be able to provide information on health and safety hazards.

Ask your management about your organization's written policies on health and safety. They should have written plans for many safety issues.



NOTES

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NOTES

A person in a white shirt and black pants is carrying a large cardboard box. The background consists of horizontal lines, suggesting a document or a list.

ABOUT IRWIN SIEGEL AGENCY, INC.

Irwin Siegel Agency, Inc. (ISA) is a leading insurance and risk management organization serving the Human Service field and insures service providers in 50 states. ISA continues to set the standards of quality, innovation, and value when it comes to developing new programs that meet the dynamic nature of the Human Services field.

We are here to support your efforts of supporting others, to provide the products and coverage your facilities need, to develop and share risk management tools and services to protect, while maintaining the compassion and education that holds ISA above ordinary insurance providers

Insurance coverages include General Liability, Professional Liability, Property, Inland Marine, Crime, Umbrella and Commercial Automobile. Additional coverages are available for Youth Protection, Directors & Officers, Volunteer Accident, Environmental and Pollution Liability, HIPAA Protector, and Workers' Compensation.

ARE YOU COVERED?

Some relevant products available through ISA include:

- Workers' Compensation Insurance
- Volunteer Accident Insurance
- Directors & Officers Liability Insurance
- HIPAA Coverage (Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act)
- Employment Practices Liability Insurance

Availability may vary by state

SAMPLE OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Printed Publications

- Workers' Compensation: Loss Control Program Manual
- Compliance and Ethics: A Guide to the Development of a Compliance Program
- Safety Committee: A Guide to the Development and Implementation of an Effective Safety Committee

Flyers & Bulletins

- Preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls
- First Aid Kit: Requirements and Recommendations
- Keep Agency Data Safe

Video Lending Library

- The Basics of Safe Lifting
- Safety Matters
- Safety Orientation and Accident Prevention

Partner Programs

- Online Training
- Background Checks and Screening Services
- Vehicle Incident Monitoring

And much more...

Contact our Risk Management Division
for additional resources and partner services

1.800.622.8272

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www.siegelagency.com

This loss control brochure is offered in the hope that readers will benefit from it and take adequate steps to avoid conditions that might result in loss. It does not intend to be a complete discussion of the subject, nor do we guarantee that compliance with its suggestions will assure the safety of persons and property.

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