



Safe Lifting Techniques

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Can you think of even one job or occupation where you never have to lift? I can't. Lifting is very much a part of our everyday jobs. And, because it's something we do so often, we tend to do it automatically, without thinking. At least we don't think about lifting until our backs start to hurt.

Lifting incorrectly can result in a variety of injuries. Back strain is probably the one most common type of injury. A back strain usually results from over-stretching certain muscles. Another type of injury that can result from lifting incorrectly is a hernia. Both of these injuries can be extremely painful. Both are usually the result of incorrect body mechanics and/or extreme exertion. The good thing is that all injuries that may result as a consequence of incorrect lifting are preventable.

Don't underestimate the importance of being in good physical condition. Years of poor posture, overeating, lack of exercise, and stress can catch up with you. Poor physical conditioning, coupled with incorrect lifting, can be a hazardous combination where your personal health and safety are concerned. Learn how your back works, what its limitations are, and what you can do to keep it healthy. Ask your family physician for recommendations to strengthen your back, then practice them regularly.

Safe lifting plays a major part in your effort to maintain a healthy back and prevent injury to it. Even though there doesn't seem to be just one right method to lift an object, there are lifting techniques that can reduce the strain on your lower back.

Correct lifting techniques involve several common steps. They are:

1. Size up the load. Look it over, decide if you can handle it alone or if you will need help. When in doubt, ask for help. Moving an object that is too heavy for one person to lift safely is not worth strained and sore back muscles.
2. Size up the area. Check the surroundings in which you will be handling the object. Make sure the area is clear of obstructions if you must carry the object any distance.
3. Get a good grip. While lifting and carrying an object it becomes an extension of your

- body. You support and move the object. Your grip has to be firm and sure.
4. Position your feet to set a good foundation. Good foot position allows you to keep your balance and use your powerful leg muscles. The larger muscles of your legs are much more powerful and durable than your relatively weaker back muscles. Let your leg muscles do the majority of the work -- they can handle it.
 5. Keep the load close to your body. Think of your arms and the load as a pry bar. The further the load is from your body, the longer the bar and the more force it will place on your back. By keeping the load close to your body, you reduce the amount of stress placed on your lower back.
 6. Avoid twisting your upper body. Twisting compounds the stresses and forces of lifting and carrying an object. It affects your center of balance. Once you have established a good foundation with your feet, use them to change direction. This technique is especially important when moving an object a short distance, like from the floor to a conveyor line.
 7. Practice team lifting. Teamwork is critical when someone is helping you lift and carry a load. Both of you should discuss and decide, in advance, how you're going to handle the load. Decide and check your route - make sure there are no obstructions. The person in the position to observe and direct the other should be the leader. Lifting, carrying, and lowering should be done in unison. Communicate with your lifting partner; let him or her know what's happening. If you feel that your grip is slipping, warn your partner. Don't let the load drop suddenly without warning your partner.

Everyone has a way of lifting that seems most natural. When we were toddlers, just learning to walk, we picked up objects very much like we've described here. As we mature and develop a little better sense of balance, we began to bend forward at the waist to pick up something. As we've noted here, lifting alters your balance. The lifting technique of the unsteady toddler is the safer way. Examine your lifting techniques to prevent injury to your back. Your personal health and safety is your responsibility. You are being counted on to perform your job safely. These techniques will help you to prevent injury:

- Stay in good physical shape**
- Size up the load; ask for help**
- Get a good grip**
- Set a good foundation; position your feet for lifting**
- Use your powerful leg muscles**
- Keep the load close to your body**
- Maintain your balance**
- Avoid twisting your upper body**

