

SAFE LIFTING PRINCIPLES

Most back problems develop slowly over time. Careful attention to lifting on the job and at home, combined with regular exercise to maintain fitness and strength, can help keep your back healthy.

Keep these safe lifting principles in mind to reduce your risk of back injury:

1. Size up the load. Test it to see if you can lift it safely. Can you grasp it securely? Good handholds (cut-outs, handles) will make the load easier to lift. Make sure the load is balanced in your hands.
2. Get as close to the load as possible before lifting it, and keep it close once you've lifted it. If possible, slide the load towards you before picking it up.
3. Keep the load as close to your body as possible. If the load is large and cannot be placed between your knees as they are bent, bend at the hips and waist with your knees relaxed. It is more important to keep the load close than it is to bend your knees.

One solution to lifting a larger load is to get another person to help you. A better solution is to use mechanical assistance (hand trucks, carts) to avoid lifting altogether.

4. Make sure your footing is secure. Do not lift objects that obscure vision and footing. Plan ahead and make sure that your travel path is clear of obstructions and that there are no slip hazards such as a wet floor.
5. Do not twist while lifting! Move your feet so that they point in the direction of the lift as you turn.
6. Lift smoothly and slowly. Do not jerk the load.
7. Organize the work so as to avoid lifting from the floor or above shoulder level. Items to be handled should be between knee and shoulder height.
8. If you have a lot of lifting to do during the day, try not to do it all at once. Alternate lifting tasks with lighter work to give your body a chance to recover. Remember, mechanical assistance is just as important for repetitive lifting as it is for heavy lifting.
9. Use the same principles when lowering or placing the load after lifting.
10. Try to avoid carrying a load more than 10 feet without getting mechanical assistance. Use a dolly or cart.