



## Safety Newsletter

# My Back Has Been Weak For About A Week!

## Back Injuries

Jokes about nagging back pain get standup comedians a lot of laughs, but back strains and sprains are not at all funny, nor should they be an unavoidable curse to anyone.

Back injuries suffered in California's workplaces last year ran up a bill of millions of dollars. Those disabling back injuries were no laughing matter for the workers who lost time from work or from their personal activities. The sad truth is that most of the pain and lost time could have been prevented if workers had been more aware of how their backs function and how to safely lift bulky or heavy loads.

The back is a network of fragile ligaments, discs, and muscles which can easily be thrown out of order. The back's complex design breaks down when it is forced to perform activities it was not designed to do.

One sure way to risk injuring the back is to lift heavy or bulky loads improperly or unassisted. The unsupported back cannot operate like a derrick or a crane boom. Lifting with the back twisted or bent just begs for a pulled muscle or ruptured disc. The back can be damaged quickly but can take a long time to heal. So workers should be encouraged to do their lifting with good sense and a little extra help from a co-worker or mechanical aid.

Workers should learn to squat over the item to be lifted, and face it squarely. In this position, the back gets added lifting strength and power from the legs and arms. Teach workers to tilt the item on edge with its

long axis straight up so the center of the weight is as high as possible above the ground. Next, the worker should move up close to the item, because the backbone must act as a supporting column, and it takes the least strain close in. In this position, the worker is ready to lift. Still squatting, the feet should be set with legs pointed right at the load, with the back straightened, the worker may then grasp the load with both arms and slowly stand up with it.

A good way to help workers learn the right from the wrong way to lift is to have them practice lifting correctly a few times. They will notice that the correct way to lift is the easiest way to lift the load, with the least strain and awkwardness. To lift the wrong way will, over time, cause injury and pain and then no one will be laughing.

Attached to this article are two links to guides that should be useful to training and refresher topics for your scheduled safety meetings. Scroll over title and control click or copy paste into browser.



## Follow these tips to avoid compressing the spinal discs or straining your lower back when you are lifting:



### Keep a wide base of support

Your feet should be shoulder-width apart, with one foot slightly ahead of the other (karate stance).

### Squat down

Bending at the hips and knees only. If needed, put one knee to the floor and your other knee in front of you, bent at a right angle (half kneeling).

### Keep good posture

Look straight ahead, and keep your back straight, your chest out, and your shoulders back. This helps keep your upper back straight while having a slight arch in your lower back.

### Slowly lift

By straightening your hips and knees (not your back). Keep your back straight, and don't twist as you lift.

### Hold

The load as close to your body as possible, at the level of your belly button.

### Use your feet

To change direction, taking small steps.

### Lead with your hips

As you change direction. Keep your shoulders in line with your hips as you move.

### Set down

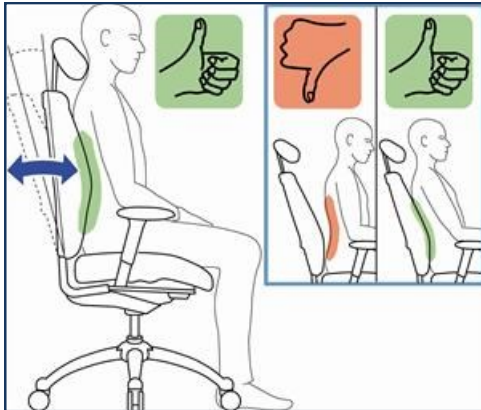
Your load carefully, squatting with the knees and hips only.

### Keep in mind:

- Do not attempt to lift by bending forward. Bend your hips and knees to squat down to your load, keep it close to your body, and straighten your legs to lift.
- Never lift a heavy object above shoulder level.
- Avoid turning or twisting your body while lifting or holding a heavy object.

# Tips for Computer Users

Repetitive and prolonged use of a computer keyboard and/or mouse can lead to muscle aches and discomfort. Posture and positioning are important. Try to incorporate the following tips into your work style to avoid problems.



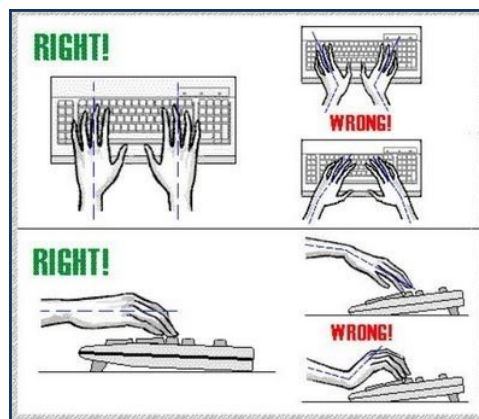
## Maintain Good Posture When Working

- Sit all the way back in the chair against the backrest.
- Keep your knees equal to, or lower, than your hips with your feet supported.
- Keep your elbows in a slightly open angle (100° to 110°) with your wrists in a straight position. The keyboard tilt can help you attain the correct arm position. A negative tilt (front of keyboard higher than back) helps when working in upright sitting positions. If you recline, a positive tilt (front of the keyboard lower than the back) might be necessary.

## Avoid Overreaching

- Keep the mouse and keyboard within close reach.
- Center the most frequently used section of the keyboard directly in front of you.
- Center the monitor in front of you at arm's length distance and position the top of the monitor 2" to 3" above seated eye level. You should be able to view the screen without turning or tilting your head up or down.
- Place source documents on a document folder positioned between your monitor and keyboard. If there is not enough space, place documents on an elevated surface close to your screen.

## Use Good Typing Technique



- Float your arms above the keyboard and keep your wrist straight when keying.
- If you use a palmrest, use it to support your palms when pausing, not while keying.
- Hit the keyboard keys with light force. The average user keys four times harder than necessary.

- Keep your wrists straight and hands relaxed when using your pointer.
- Don't hold the pointer with a tight grip or extend fingers above the activation buttons.
- Avoid moving the pointer with your thumb or wrist. Movement should originate at your shoulder and elbow.

## Reduce Glare and Eye Fatigue

- Place your monitor away from bright lights and windows. Use an optical glass glare filter when necessary.
- Take eye breaks and intermittently refocus on distant objects. Try palming your eyes in your hands to reduce eye fatigue.

## Take Breaks

- Take 1 or 2 minute breaks every 20-30 minutes, and 5 minute breaks every hour.
- Take eye breaks and intermittently refocus on distant objects. Try palming your eyes in your hands to reduce eye fatigue.

## Wallets

- Sitting on your wallet may cause pain, tingling, and numbness in the gluteal muscles. Any pelvic tilt caused by your wallet may also lead to imbalanced muscle strain in your back and hips.
- To relieve pain associated with wallet-related imbalances, carefully stretch your hamstrings and hip muscles. Also consider the Piriformis Stretch to focus on your deeper gluteal muscles.

## SELF-INSPECTION

The most widely accepted way to identify hazards is to conduct safety and health inspections because the only way to be certain of an actual situation is to look at it directly from time to time.

Begin a program of self-inspection in your own workplace. Self-inspection is essential if you are to know where probable hazards exist and whether they are under control.

This section includes checklists designed to assist you in self-inspection fact-finding. The checklists can give you some indication of where to begin taking action to make your business safer and more healthful for all of your employees.

**These checklists are by no means all-inclusive** and not all of the checklists will apply to your business. You might want to start by selecting the areas that are most critical to your business, then expanding your self-inspection checklists over time to fully cover all areas that pertain to your business. Remember that a checklist is a tool to help, not a definitive statement of what is mandatory. Use checklists only for guidance.

**Don't spend time with items that have no application to your business.** Make sure that each item is seen by you or your designee and leave nothing to memory or chance. Write down what you see or don't see and what you think you should do about it.

Add information from your completed checklists to injury information, employee information, and process and equipment information to build a foundation to help you determine what problems exist. Then, as you use the OSHA standards in your problem-solving process, it will be easier for you to determine the actions needed to solve these problems.

Once the hazards have been identified, institute the control procedures described at page 9 and establish your four-point safety and health program.

### Self-Inspection Scope

Your self-inspections should cover safety and health issues in the following areas:

**Building and Grounds Conditions** - floors, walls, ceilings, exits, stairs, walkways, ramps, platforms, driveways, aisles.

**Chemicals** - storage, handling, transportation, spills, disposals, amounts used, labeling, toxicity or other harmful effects, warning signs, supervision, training, protective clothing and equipment, hazard communication requirements.

**Electricity** - equipment, switches, breakers, fuses, switch-boxes, junctions, special fixtures, circuits, insulation, extensions, tools, motors, grounding, national electric code compliance.

**Evacuation Plan** - establish and practice procedures for an emergency evacuation, e.g., fire, chemical/biological incidents, bomb threat; include escape procedures and routes, critical plant operations, employee accounting following an evacuation, rescue and medical duties and ways to report emergencies.

**Fire Prevention** - extinguishers, alarms, sprinklers, smoking rules, exits, personnel assigned, separation of flammable materials, waste disposal and training of personnel.

**First Aid Program/Supplies** - medical care facilities locations, posted emergency phone numbers, accessible first aid kits.

**Housekeeping Program** - waste disposal, tools, objects, materials, leakage and spillage, cleaning methods, schedules, work areas, remote areas, storage areas.

**Machinery** - maintenance, lockout/tagout, grounding, work space, location, purchasing standards.

**Maintenance** - provide regular and preventive maintenance on all equipment used at the worksite, recording all work performed on the machinery and by training personnel on the proper care and servicing of the equipment.

**Personnel** - training, including hazard identification training.

**PPE** - type, size, maintenance, repair, age, storage, assignment of responsibility, training in care and use, rules of use, method of assignment.

**Transportation** - motor vehicle safety, seat belts, vehicle maintenance, safe driver programs.