



BACK STRAIN

HOW WILL IT AFFECT ME?

Almost anyone can suffer from back strain, but people who handle equipment are more prone than most. Just because you are young, and fit doesn't mean you won't suffer from back pain later in life. It could affect your job and your social life.

WHAT IS BACK STRAIN

When we say strain what we really mean is injury. That can involve damage to your muscles, to the ligaments which bind the bones in your back, or to the discs which separate them. The most common type of injury is damage to the muscles and ligaments. Although temporary, the pain can be intense and prolonged. However, the longer you mistreat your back the more likely you are to suffer a "slipped" or prolapsed disc. The disc gets squeezed out from between the bones and presses on your spinal nerves. The result is severe, long term pain extending down into the leg.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Back injury is not only caused by lifting too big of a load. You may just as easily damage your back if you put strain on it:

- before your muscles have had time to warm up
- after your body has become tired
- when your back is bent, stretched, or twisted
- suddenly, by jerking the load, or when you stumble or lose your footing

HOW DO I AVOID IT?

The first thing is to see if the job could be organized so that handling is not necessary. Could a machine do the handling instead? If those are not reasonable options then you must make sure you do your work in a way, which avoids injuring your back. A big load is bound to create problems, but small ones can cause just as much damage if handled in the wrong way. Limber up before you start and avoid using your back when you are tired. Consider suitable exercises.

THESE SIMPLE RULES WILL HELP

- only lift when it is necessary
- only lift loads well within your capacity
- do not lift with your back bent, stretched, or twisted
- always keep loads close to the body
- get help if you need it
- give yourself proper rest breaks (coordinated with supervisor)

AID TOOLS

You will find it a lot easier to follow these rules if you invest in a few simple tools. Used correctly they will help you do the job with a minimum of effort and with a straight back. Slings, overhead cranes, forklifts, two-man lifts...all are potential aids in accomplishing the task at hand.

CORRECTED BODY POSITION

Before you lift, take up a position, which gives you, secure footing and which does not force you into an awkward posture. Place your feet apart with one leg slightly forward to maintain balance. If you are levering over a component or a piece of equipment, moving pieces, or just picking up an item of substantial weight – the best way to do it is with bent knees, straight back and with the load as close to the body as possible. That way you are lifting with your strong leg muscles rather than your back. It is very important that you have a good grip when lifting and are free to adjust your position for the best lift. Use both hands otherwise you will tend to twist your back.

SURVIVING BACK STRAIN

If you do hurt your back, make sure a temporary condition does not become a permanent disability. Stay active and try simple OTC pain relief. It is recommended to do exercise which will help guard against injury and speed the recovery time.