



Proper Lifting for Back Safety

Lower back pain and other more serious musculoskeletal injuries to the back can be caused by a single improper movement or can develop over a period of time. For instance, a sudden, fast movement (especially while handling heavy objects) may immediately lead to painful muscle strains. These strains may then develop into more serious injuries if the muscles are not allowed to heal before they're exposed to additional or repeated stress.

The muscles, tendons, ligaments, and discs in your back move, stretch and flex whenever you lift objects, bend, or stretch. The discs that sit between the vertebrae in your back act as shock absorbers and keep the vertebrae from grinding against each other. When you bend your back, the discs get squeezed. If you're holding a heavy load, the discs get squeezed a lot harder. Twisting while lifting or holding a load puts even more stress on discs. Sudden, severe squeezing or twisting can cause discs to rupture or herniate. There are actions you can take to prevent muscle strains, damage to your discs, and other back injuries.

Plan the Lift:

- Wear appropriate shoes to avoid slips and trips.
- Check the load for nails, splinters, and sharp edges.
- Test the load for stability and weight.
- Repack or reorganize containers to improve stability.
- Never lift more than you can safely handle yourself.
- Check your route and look for tripping hazards.

When Lifting:

- Get a secure grip using both hands.
- Always keep your back straight; bend your knees and reach down to grab the load.
- Keep the load in your power zone as much as possible: above the knees, below the shoulders, and close to the body.
- Avoid jerking the load; use smooth, even motions.
- Don't twist your body; step to one side or the other to turn.
- Use extra caution when lifting loads that may become unstable.
- Reduce repetitive trauma to your back and other joints by alternating heavy lifting and other forceful exertions with less physically demanding tasks.
- Remember to take rest breaks.

Have you ever seen a professional pitcher go to the mound cold, without warming up in



the bull pen first? Of course not, because the muscles and joints in his arm are very valuable. Isn't your back valuable too?

Warming up isn't for wimps, it's smart. Don't lift with cold, stiff muscles. Stretch your back some, and warm up before you start lifting.

SAFETY REMINDER

When you wear gloves, you'll need to use more force to grasp and hold loads. For instance, wearing heat-resistant gloves can reduce your grip by up to 40%.