

BACK PROTECTION DURING STANDING WORK

The lower back is probably the most used part of the spine, even during what seems like a static activity such as standing. When your job requires you to stand much of the time, remember these pointers to help prevent low-back pain and injury:

Move around. This helps keep the spine healthy. Avoid standing in one position for prolonged periods of time. Move around when possible to improve circulation and reduce muscle fatigue.

Stand with your back straight. Stand on a firm surface with your chest forward and shoulders back. **Tip:** To help pull your shoulders into correct position, simply roll them up and back and hold them in that resting place. Tuck in your stomach muscles so that your lower back stays straight rather than swayed inward.

Avoid awkward movements. Resist twisting your lower back when reaching. Instead, move your feet so that you are closer to and can face the area or object.

Minimize bending. If you must bend for an object, change your stance, get close to the object and squat. Avoid bending at the waist.

Rest on something. Leaning on a solid support helps to reduce fatigue when you're standing. You can also use a footstool to rest one foot at a time.

Stretch gently.

It takes less than one minute to give your back a beneficial rest. A gentle stretch (unless your health care provider has recommended against it) can reduce muscle tension and discomfort.



MORE TIPS FOR A STRONG, HEALTHY BACK

Lose excess weight. A "spare tire" strains back muscles and the disks in the lower back. That helps explain why most obese people have recurring back problems.



Work out wisely. Some workouts are more back-friendly than others. **Good choices:** stomach- and back-strengthening exercises, walking and swimming (except for butterfly and breast strokes).

Let your back rest too. Don't sleep on your stomach, which causes the back to curve excessively. **Better:** Lie on your side with your knees bent to relieve pressure on the disks. If you like to lie on your back, put a thin pillow under your head and a larger pillow under your knees.

Don't rely on back belts. There's a lack of scientific evidence to support claims that back belts, also called back supports or abdominal belts, prevent injury, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). In fact, workers who use back belts often wear them incorrectly or lift loads that are too heavy, thinking the back belt will protect them. Whether or not you use a back belt, lift carefully and correctly.

It's a myth ... that bed rest speeds recovery for a bad back. Bed rest may be recommended for an extremely sore back for a period of about two days. But continuing normal activities as pain allows may speed recovery. Remember to limit lifting, twisting, bending, prolonged sitting or wearing high heels — all of which can further strain your back.

Final thought: Millions of people see a doctor each year because of back pain, often because they lifted or moved something incorrectly. Using safe lifting techniques, exercising regularly and practicing proper body mechanics can help keep your back healthy, strong and pain-free.

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SAFE LIFTING

... AND OTHER
WAYS TO PROTECT
YOUR BACK





SMART MOVES PREVENT BACK PAIN AND STRAIN

Most people suffer from back pain at some point. Most of the time the pain is not a sign of serious injury but a sign of muscle strain. Back pain can range from a dull, constant ache to a sudden, sharp pain that makes it hard to move. It can start quickly (if you lift something too heavy) or it can develop gradually.

When you lift, your lower back absorbs most of the stress. Improper lifting, poor body mechanics (such as posture) and being out of shape all make your back more prone to strain. What happens: Disks that sit between the vertebrae of the spine can rupture or break down. Muscles can strain or tear.

Back pain is much easier to prevent than it is to cure. Back injuries can be slow to heal and are likely to recur. The more you understand about how and why your back can become injured, the better judgment you'll have to make smart moves that can keep your back pain- and injury-free. The tips in this brochure can help.



Think Before You Lift

Test the load. See how well you can handle the object alone. Check for sharp edges, awkward handling and whether or not you can grip the object well. Ask for help or plan to use a hand truck, pushcart or mechanical device when the load is too heavy or too hard to handle alone. Don't take chances.

Know where you are going. Is the path clear of trip or slip hazards? Where can you stop to rest? Know where you plan to unload and make sure the area is clear and prepared.

Get into proper position. You should be close to the load in a comfortable stance, with your feet about shoulder-width apart for the best balance and stability.

Checklist for Safe Lifting

- ✓ Stand close to the object.
- ✓ Bend your knees (not at your waist).
- ✓ Use the strong muscles of your legs to power the lift.
- ✓ Keep the object close.
- ✓ When changing direction, turn with your feet (don't twist your body while holding the object).
- ✓ Set the object down the same way you picked it up, with your knees bent and your back straight.



Injuries from lifting generally are preventable by using proper lifting techniques; exercising for strength, agility and balance; and getting help when the load is too heavy or awkward to handle alone.



How do you carry?

It's best to balance weight evenly as you carry, rather than distributing the weight in a lopsided way.

EXERCISE FOR BETTER BACK HEALTH

When you're physically fit, the muscles, tendons and ligaments in your back are stronger, better conditioned and more injury-resistant. **Four areas of fitness:**

Exercises for balance and stability.

Yoga teaches the art of controlled breathing, meditation and posing. Yoga can improve flexibility and balance, and it may help with some chronic conditions such as low-back pain.

Core muscle conditioning. Strong abdominals support the lower back and improve posture (good posture helps prevent back pain and strain too).

Aerobics. Not only do aerobic exercises strengthen your cardiovascular system, they also condition your whole body. Back-friendly workouts include swimming and walking.

Stretching. The right way to stretch involves relaxed, slow and controlled movements — not bouncing, jerking or stretching to the point of pain.

The bottom line: A fit body is better equipped to protect your hardworking back. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise most days. Check with your health care provider before beginning an exercise routine, especially if you are over 40 and you've been out of shape for some time or if you have an existing health condition.

