

Back Protection Safety Toolbox Talk

Use this toolbox talk to educate field crews on the proper way to protect their backs while working on the jobsite.

Back Protection Safety Talk

Some of the most prevalent and hardest to prevent injuries on the job are back injuries. More than one million workers suffer from back injuries each year according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They also account for one of every five workplace injuries or illnesses.

The way our spine works also attributes to the high number of workplace injuries each year. The complex structure makes it possible to cause an injury and subsequent pain from even the simplest movements. Most people know that turning from side to side while lifting heavy items is never a good idea and can cause injury. Most do not understand that any action that puts a strain or burden of added weight on your back can result in injury. In this toolbox talk, we'll discuss the two types of back injuries, back safety best practices, and what to do should you injure your back on the jobsite.

Types of Back Injuries

There are different types of back injuries that can cause different levels of pain. Some can be temporary and some can be permanent.

Acute Back Pain

Acute back pain lasts between three to six weeks before it goes away. It may occur immediately after the injury and be quite severe, but it is temporary. Some types of acute pain are muscle spasms, strains, or muscle tears. Acute back pain tends to resolve on its own with self-care and there is no loss of function.

Chronic Back Pain

Chronic back pain lasts longer than six weeks and may be permanent. For some, it lasts for months, years, or even the rest of their lives. Some types of chronic back pain are herniated disc, sciatica, and osteoarthritis. Chronic back pain normally requires intervention from a doctor for pain management and treatment.

Protect Your Back on the Jobsite

It is not uncommon for workers to experience a back injury in the workplace. Lifting, pushing, twisting, and pulling can all cause back injuries. If you overuse or [over-stretch](#) your muscles you can also cause strains. When on the job there are several ways you can protect yourself from back injuries.

The best option to prevent back injuries due to lifting is to eliminate doing any [manual lifts](#) if at all possible. In order to achieve this, you should do proper [pre planning of work](#), [proper setup of work areas](#), and use proper pieces of equipment such as a [forklift](#) to complete the lift.

Proper Lifting Precautions

There are a few proper precautions you can take at work to help prevent back injuries. These include:

1. Know the weight of what you are picking up
2. Know the center of gravity for what you are picking up
3. Make sure the path is clear from where you pick the item up to where you are setting it down
4. Take breaks if needed
5. If you take a break, put the item on an elevated surface
6. Get help if the item is too heavy
7. Use proper lifting technique

How to Protect Your Back While Lifting

When you are manually lifting you should do the following to avoid compressing the spinal discs or straining your lower back:

1. Keep a Wide Base of Support

Your feet should be shoulder-width apart with one foot slightly ahead of the other

2. Squat Down

Bend at the hips and knees only. If you need to put one knee on the floor and your other knee in front of you at a right angle

3. Keep Good Posture

Look straight ahead and keep your back straight, your chest out, and your shoulders back. This will help keep your upper back straight while your lower back will have a slight arch.

4. Slowly Lift

Do this by straightening your hips and knees. Keep your back straight and do not twist as you lift.

5. Hold Items Correctly

Make sure you hold your item as close to your body as you can at the level of your belly button.

6. Use Your Feet

If you need to change direction, move your feet in that direction taking small steps as needed.

7. Lead With Your Hips

When you are changing direction make sure you keep your shoulders in line with your hips as you move

8. Set Down Properly

When putting your item down do so carefully. Squat with your knees and hips only like when you picked the item up.

Other Back Injury Prevention Techniques

Preventing back pain is hard and sometimes no matter how hard you try to avoid it, it still happens. Here is a list of [back injury prevention](#) techniques that may help prevent back pain:

1. Exercise- swimming, walking, bicycling, etc.
2. Wear lumbar support belts.
3. While standing keep your head up and stomach pulled in.
4. When sitting use a chair of appropriate height with good lumbar support.
5. Get a good supportive mattress.
6. Do not lift objects that are too heavy for you.

What to do if You Injure Your Back at Work

If you injure your back while at work you should always [report the injury](#) to your employer or supervisor right away. If you have an injury that occurs gradually, you need to report this as soon as you realize that it is work related. Your supervisor will then advise you on the next steps to take.

Back Safety Starts With You

Employees can do a lot to reduce the risks of suffering from a back injury. Make sure you are taking care when lifting, taking breaks, and asking for help when needed. If you do suffer from an injury remember to go straight to a supervisor as soon as possible to report it.