



PARTNER UPDATE

The difference is how we treat you.

WORK PARTNERS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS

Volume 1, Issue 6

September 2016

Back Safety and Proper Lifting Techniques

Leanne Lundgren, PT, DPT, CSCS

Doctor of Physical Therapy | WorkPartners Occupational Health Specialists

Back injuries account for 42% of all musculoskeletal injuries in the workplace. Four out of 5 of these injuries occurred when an employee was lifting. 64% occur in men and 36% occur in women. Back injuries account for 2.9 million lost days of work per year in the United States. With this being said, lifting mechanics and back safety is something every employer and employee should be aware of whether they work in a job requiring manual labor or a job that is more sedentary.

Causes

Back injuries are most often caused from improper lifting techniques and poor body mechanics. Back injuries are also caused from repetitive lifting, twisting motions, bending of the back, being static for prolonged periods, poor abdominal stability, a collision, or a fall. The spine is very complex consisting of 7 vertebra in the neck, 12 throughout the mid back, and 5 in the low back. The spine then connects to the sacrum which attaches to the pelvis. Each vertebrae is separated by a disc and each vertebrae is connected by several ligaments. Running down the center of the spine is a network of nerves called the spinal cord and exiting between each vertebrae is a specific nerve. On top of this detailed structure is several layers of muscles that allow for motions of the spine. If any of these structures are compromised you may experience back pain.

Prevention

Warming up before work will elevate your heart rate which will bring blood flow to the muscles and discs of the spine. This prepares your muscles to begin activity and decreases your chances of injury. Warming up may entail walking around the building, performing gentle stretching, or self-massaging any sore areas prior to starting the work day.

Maintaining a slight curve in your low back and a slight curve in your upper back is important for the health of your back. This may mean putting a towel roll or back support behind your low back when sitting at your desk, or putting a sticky note on your computer to remind yourself to keep your head stacked over your chest and your shoulders back when working at the computer.

Using proper lifting mechanics is the best way to avoid back injuries. Whether an item is 5lbs or 50lbs it should be lifted with the same mechanics. The following are things to keep in mind when lifting.

- Bend down with your legs and maintain a straight spine.
- Maintain a straight back and contract your abdominals during the lift.
- Do not twist with your back but rather move with your feet to change directions when walking with a load.
- The load you are lifting should always be held close to your body.
- Do not use fast or jerky motions when lifting.
- Ask for help when lifting heavy loads.

(Continued Page 2)





PARTNER UPDATE

The difference is how we treat you.

WORKPARTNERS OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SPECIALISTS

Volume 1, Issue 6

September 2016

Pay special attention to heavy lifting, frequent lifting, and awkward lifting, and do your best to minimize these forms of lifting. Ways to help decrease the probability of your employees getting injured during lifting after addressing body mechanics are listed below.



- Decrease the weight of the objects lifted. This may require packaging material into smaller loads.
- Use mechanical assistance whenever possible.
- Have employees slide objects along the floor rather than lifting them.
- Perform a team lift when moving large or heavy loads.
- Avoid unnecessary lifting.
- Use mobile storage.
- Move any obstacles in the way.
- Reduce shelf depth to allow for easier access to materials.
- Use step stool or rolling stairs to reaching items up high.
- Arrange storage so heavy items are on the bottom and lighter items are on top.
- Rotate employee responsibilities for those employees performing manual labor.

What Can Be Done

In the event of a back injury ice or heat can be used for relief. For stiffness and tightness of the spine I recommend heat. A heat pack can easily be made by filling a long sock with rice and putting it in the microwave for 1 minute. This will remain warm for up to 15 minutes. For a sore painful back or right after an injury ice is recommended. Filling a zip lock bag with 3 parts water and 1 part rubbing alcohol and freezing it will create a slushy ice pack. This ice pack will mold around your body. Icing in 15 minute bouts is recommended several times a day.

Depending on the severity of the injury ice and heat may not be enough to return an employee to their previous level of function. A doctor may recommend a pain medication, anti-inflammatory, or muscle relaxer. Additional therapies may be appropriate such as physical therapy, chiropractic, or acupuncture.

WorkPartners Occupational Health Specialists

Located in North San Diego County, WorkPartners clinics are full service Occupational Health clinics dedicated to supporting the health and wellness of local employees. Learn more at www.WorkPartnersOHS.com.

