



Mott Community College Health Services

PREVENTING BACK INJURIES

We have all moved the wrong way and felt a pain in our backs. It isn't so much the one thing we did incorrectly the one time, however, that causes our back pain. The pain is more likely to be the result of injury from the "wear and tear" on our backs over time. Your back is always working: caring for patients, cleaning or repairing the building, delivering supplies or sitting at a desk. Any movement that requires lifting, twisting or reaching may put us at risk for a back injury. Injury is more likely to happen if we don't pay attention to our posture while sitting, standing, walking, or carrying things through out the day.

Understanding how your back works is the beginning of back safety.

A healthy back is strong, flexible and pain-free. Its chief functions are to support your upper body, protect your spinal cord, allow flexibility and to provide a point of attachment for muscles and ligaments. To be able to perform all of its functions, your back's three natural curves need to be maintained properly. Think about a string pulling from the top of your head down through your hips to keep your head, shoulders and hips in a straight line on top of each other.

Remember:

- Keep the curve at your neck slightly inward.
- Keep the curve at your upper back slightly outward.
- Keep the curve at your lower back a little more inward.

The best way to prevent back injury is to maintain good posture when you are sitting, standing, walking and lifting.

When sitting: Sit with your back straight and your feet flat on the floor. Your knees should be level with your hips. Use the lumbar support on the back of the chair if it has one. If there is no lumbar support, you can make one by using a towel roll or a small pillow.

When standing or walking: Wear comfortable, low-heeled shoes. Don't stand in one position for a prolonged period of time. Maintain good posture, and walk with your toes pointed forward. Always watch where you are going. Keep your work surface no more than six inches below your waist, and avoid bending at your waist to pick things up.

When lifting: Keep equipment and supplies within reach. If you need to reach more than 20 inches for them, it is too great a distance for your back. Plan all lifts before you begin, and get help if you need it. Keep your back straight, bend your knees and hold objects close to your body while lifting. Do not reach above your shoulders or behind your back to lift something. Always avoid twisting your body during a lift.

Remember, the average person should only lift 40-45 pounds without help. Ask someone to help, or use a mechanical lift when moving heavy patients or equipment.

When driving: Move the car seat forward, and keep your knees level with your hips. Sit straight, and drive with both hands on the wheel. Give your back the support it needs by using the seat's lumbar support, or a small towel roll or pillow to give your back the support it needs.

When sleeping: Give your back the support it needs while sleeping by using a firm, supportive

mattress. Lay on your side with your knees bent, or sleep on your back with a pillow under your lower legs.

Other tips for back safety:

- Avoid slips and falls.
- Maintain your ideal weight.
- Exercise to strengthen your back, leg and abdominal muscles.
- Remain flexible.
- Don't smoke.
- Consult your doctor for any back pain that does not go away within a few days, or is severe, or before beginning any new exercise program.

For more information on back safety, contact Health Services, 762-5667

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