

Back Injury Prevention Program – Loss Control

You or any of your workers can suffer a debilitating, costly back injury at any time. This sheet offers a few basic ideas to help reduce your likelihood of suffering a back injury, its costs and downtime. Your local chapter of the National Safety Council, OSHA and perhaps a local chiropractor or other health care professional can provide greater detail to satisfy more specific needs.



Comprehensive Risk Assessment

from onsite consultations to virtual surveys



Education & Training

including streaming videos by industry and hazard type



Additional Resources Available

through a Loss Control consultant or an online library

Back injury causes include poor posture; stressful working conditions; diminished body flexibility due to aging; pushing, lifting, pulling and moving objects; repeated lifting of awkward items; poor job station design; excess reaching or twisting; bending when lifting; bent posture when standing still; sitting in vibrating places (e.g. inside vehicles); lifting heavy items, lifting with forceful motions; and improper lifting techniques.

Items that contribute to back injury include fatigue, existing spinal defects or injury, aging work force, use of vibrating and pneumatic tools and increased use of assembly line practices, including increasing the line speed.

Basics of preventing back injuries include:

- Review tasks and confer with workers to identify bending, lifting and other hazards that may cause back injury and to identify ways to modify them to eliminate or minimize the hazards
- Modify tasks, e.g. reduce weight of items to be lifted; store items to be lifted between knee and shoulder height instead of on the floor; store items in tiltable bins so workers do not have to bend; provide adjustable height workbenches so workers do not have to stoop
- Store heavy items at waist height
- Arrange workstations to minimize bending, twisting, reaching and pulling (pushing causes less exertion)
- Provide floormats, footrests or rails upon which workers who must stand in place may place a foot in order to change position and rest the back (e.g. cashiers)
- Provide adjustable chairs or stools and arrange workstations so workers may change position (e.g. clerical workers)
- Provide conveyors, rollers and other moving aids
- Make items as small as possible so they will not be awkward to move
- Train workers in safe lifting and moving of materials
- Require workers to take frequent breaks
- Provide additional workers to minimize the lifting each worker does
- Require workers to use hand trucks and other lifting aids and to seek assistance if needed
- Schedule tasks so no one works an entire shift making the same movements
- Instruct supervisors/foremen to enforce safe lifting/handling techniques
- Consider medical screening of prospective employees to whom you have offered a job (e.g. flexibility and strength testing; review medical history; spinal X-rays; employment physicals); consult with your attorney regarding Americans with Disabilities Act requirements
- Consider contracting with a “back school” service that teaches workers back anatomy and physiology; moving, carrying, pushing, pulling and lifting methods; back exercises to limber and build strength; and rehabilitation of injured workers
- Analyze back injury reports to determine root causes (e.g. worker did not know safe lifting techniques; worker carried heavy item because freight carrier delivered load to the wrong dock; worker felt embarrassed to ask for assistance) and take corrective actions
- Analyze back injury records to determine effectiveness of your prevention efforts; modify efforts as needed