# Safe Lifting Program

**Introduction**

Over their lifetime, eight out of 10 people will experience a back injury and/or "just" back pain. Most back injuries are painful, and they can be debilitating, life changing. It is important that employers take steps to prevent back injuries to their employees. (And that employees to pay attention to taking care of themselves and to follow all recommendations.) These steps require the ongoing commitment of management to provide the safest working environment possible. Although these steps entail expenditures, this is one area in which money spent now can save thousands in the future.

This program is an example of guidelines that employers should incorporate in their company's written safe lifting programs. You can use this sample program as a base, and fine-tune or customize to your specific business and facility.

**Affected Employees / Departments**

All Company Name employees’ job duties that require some lifting or materials handling are to be trained on the rules of this Safe Lifting Program.

**Design of Jobs and Tasks**

Jobs or tasks should be designed to eliminate or reduce lifting as much as possible, and to make what lifting must take place as safe as possible. *Safe design eliminates hazards and should be the first control focus*. Examples include:

* Unnecessary lifting is eliminated.
* Lifting surfaces are near waist level.
* Loads are as light as possible, such as two 25-lb. bags instead of one 50-lb. bag.
* Interrelated work surfaces or areas are as close as possible to avoid needing to twist or carry.

**Alternative Materials-Handling Techniques**  
*Alternative materials-handling techniques for carrying or moving loads are to be used whenever possible to minimize lifting and bending requirements.* These alternative materials-handling techniques include use of:

* Hoists
* Forklifts
* Dollies
* Carts
* Other mechanical devices

**Safe Lifting Techniques**

The following points outline good lifting practices and procedures, and safe lifting techniques that will minimize risks of back injury and pain. These practices are written with the lifter in mind. Lifting remains an important function despite the level of mechanization found in the workplace today, so attention must be directed toward safe lifting practices.

**The basics of good lifting:**

* Size up the load before you lift. Test by lifting one of the corners or pushing. If it is heavy or feels too clumsy, get a mechanical aid or help from a co-worker. When in doubt, do not lift alone!
* Make sure you have a clear path to carry the load – check the entire route before you lift.
* BEND YOUR KNEES. This is the single most important aspect of safe lifting.
* When performing the lift:
  + Place your feet close to the object and center yourself over the load.
  + Get a good hand hold.
  + Lift straight up, smoothly and let your legs do the work, not your back.
  + Avoid overreaching or stretching to pick up or set down a load.
  + Do not twist or turn your body once you have made the lift.
  + Set the load down properly.BEND YOUR KNEES AND NOT YOUR BACK.
* Alwayspush, not pull, the object when possible.
* Change the lifting situation if possible, to minimize a lifting hazard:
  + If it is a long load, get help. Split the load into several smaller ones, when you can, to achieve manageable lifting weight.
  + Avoiding lifts from below the knees or above the shoulders – instead use mechanical aids, positioning yourself so that the object to move is within an acceptable lifting range (between the shoulders and knees), and/or get help from your co-workers.

**Other Safe Work Issues & Techniques**

Work issues other than lifting are also related to back pain or injury. You can avoid them or improve work techniques related to them.

**Extended Sitting / Standing**

Certain jobs require long hours of standing or sitting. These conditions can create back troubles. Get up and stretch frequently if you are required to sit for long periods. If standing, ease the strain on your lower back by changing foot positions often, placing one foot on a rail or ledge. However, keep your weight evenly balanced when standing. Don't lean to one side.

**Other Materials Handling Tasks**

Tasks such as lowering, pushing, pulling and carrying can create hazards to the back as well. If the task feels uncomfortable or unnatural, utilize the alternative materials-handling techniques listed in this safe lifting program.

**Housekeeping**

Poor housekeeping – slippery floors, crowded work conditions, tools or other hazards on the floor ­– can create slip, trip or fall hazards that can result in back injury.

**Poor Posture at Work**

Be aware of proper posture when sitting, standing or reclining. When sitting, your knees should be bent at 90 degrees and your shoulders and upper back should be straight.   
  
When lying down or sleeping, keep your knees slightly bent. And it's recommended to put a pillow between your knees when sleeping on your side, or under your knees if sleeping on your back causes discomfort. Sleeping on your stomach can lead to backaches.

**Poor Lighting**

Poor lighting in the work area can lead to poor work practices that result in injuries of many types. Make sure lighting is good and appropriate for the task at hand, replace burnt-out bulbs, and point out hazardous areas to your immediate supervisor.

**Other Back Safety Issues**

Factors unrelated to work that can affect back safety include physical condition, posture, athletic or home-improvement activity, and tension and stress.

**Posture**

Whether you're standing, sitting or reclining, posture affects the amount of strain put on your back. The wrong posture increases strain on the back muscles and may bend the spine into positions that will cause trouble. When standing correctly, the spine has a natural "S" curve. The shoulders are back, and the "S" curve is directly over the pelvis. Good sitting posture should put your knees at 90 degrees. Your hips should be to the rear of the chair with your lower back not overly arched. Also, your shoulders and upper back are not rounded. Reclining posture is important, too. Sleep on your side with knees bent or sleep on your back; if either causes discomfort try placing a pillow between your knees (side) or under your knees (back). Sleeping on your stomach, especially on a sagging mattress with your head on a thick pillow, puts too much strain on the spine. Result: Morning backache.

**Poor Physical Condition**

Your physical condition can lead to back pain. If you are overweight, and especially if you have developed a pot belly, extra strain on your spine results. As a general rule of thumb estimate that every extra pound up front puts 10 pounds of strain on your back. When you are out of shape, the chances of chronic back pain are greater. Infrequent exercise is a major factor, too. A sudden strain on generally unused back muscles leads to trouble, particularly when there is a sudden twisting or turning of the back. Proper diet and exercise are sensible ways to help avoid back problems.

**Stress**

Stress is another factor that can lead to back pain. Tied in with your general physical condition, stress created from work or play can cause muscle spasms that affect the spinal nerve network. Although stress is part of everyone's life, and a certain amount of stress is normal, excessive stress causes backache. The solution is a balanced lifestyle with time to relax.

**Repetitive Trauma**

People often think back injuries result from lifting heavy or awkward objects. Many back injuries, however, do not come from a single lift, but occur from relatively minor strains over time. Back injuries, as with other cumulative trauma disorders, may arise from repeated injuries. As a worker repeats an irritating movement, the minor injuries begin to accumulate and weaken affected muscles or ligaments. Eventually a more serious injury may occur. Thus, a specific weight lifted may have little to do with any single injury. Remember to use mechanical aids when appropriate along with good lifting techniques, whenever you do any lifting. You can lift safely when performed with caution.

**Summary**

Back safety awareness is necessary to avoid adding to the prevalence and severity of back injuries throughout business and industry. Sprains and strains are the most common causes of lower back pain. Backs can be injured by improper lifting, falling, auto accidents and sports activities. But of these, lifting improperly is the largest single cause of back pain and injury. Making jobs and tasks as safe as possible, instituting proper lifting techniques, and other safety measures can significantly reduce your chance of a back-injury incident.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Common Lifting Hazards** | **Lifting Solutions** |
| Lifting with back bent and legs straight. | Keep back straight and bend your knees! |
| Holding load too far from body. | Hold load as close to the body as possible. |
| Twisting while lifting. | Redesign the lift to avoid twisting. Use your feet to turn your entire body. |
| Losing balance during a lift because: your feet are too close together, the load is uneven or unstable, the load is too heavy, vision is blocked by the load and/or path of travel uneven or has other obstacles. | Keep a wide, balanced stance with feet generally shoulder-width apart, or wider. Test the load before you lift. If the load is uneven, then redistribute the load. Use the Tripod Lift. Get help to lift the load. If the load is too heavy, find another person to help. Use mechanical lifting aids. Do not stack or carry loads that interfere with your line of sight. Preplan your lift and clear the path of clutter, locked doors, etc., before performing the lift. |
| Lifting objects from below knee level. | Use pallets, tables or other devices to keep stored materials off the floor. |
| Poor coordination between two or more people during the lift. | Communicate! Plan the lift together in order to coordinate your actions. |

**Acknowledgement Form**

I have received and reviewed the Company Name Safe Lifting Program, and I agree to comply with it as it pertains to my position.

Employee name

Date

Manager Name