Safety Minute

Preventing Strains & Sprains

Montana State Fund

Sprains and strains account for about one-third of injuries in the construction industry. A sprain is an injury to a ligament, which is the tough, fibrous tissue that connects bones to other bones. This type of injury involves either a stretching or tearing of the ligament. Ankle, knee, and wrist injuries make up the majority of sprains.

On the other hand, a strain involves injury to a muscle or a tendon—the tissue that connects muscles to bones. Back injuries are the most common type of strain. Depending on the severity, a strain can range from a simple overstretch to a partial or complete tear of the muscle or tendon.

These soft tissue injuries frequently occur, are painful, and can be disabling, often leading to lengthy recovery periods. To help prevent sprains and strains, maintaining good physical fitness is essential.

Minimizing the Chances of Sprains

- Practice Safety Measures: Implement safety practices to help prevent falls. For instance, maintain a clean work environment by keeping areas free of clutter.
- Avoid Strenuous Activity: Do not engage in strenuous tasks if you are feeling tired or in pain.
- Exercise Caution on Slippery Surfaces: Be extra cautious when working on slippery surfaces, such as ice or wet floors.
- Wear Appropriate Footwear: Always wear suitable and properly fitting footwear for your job.
- Be Careful on Uneven Surfaces: Use extra caution when walking on uneven surfaces, as these can easily cause ankle or knee twists.
- Check Your Foot Placement: When stepping off ladders, always look where you will place your feet before putting your full weight on them.

Material Handling Safety

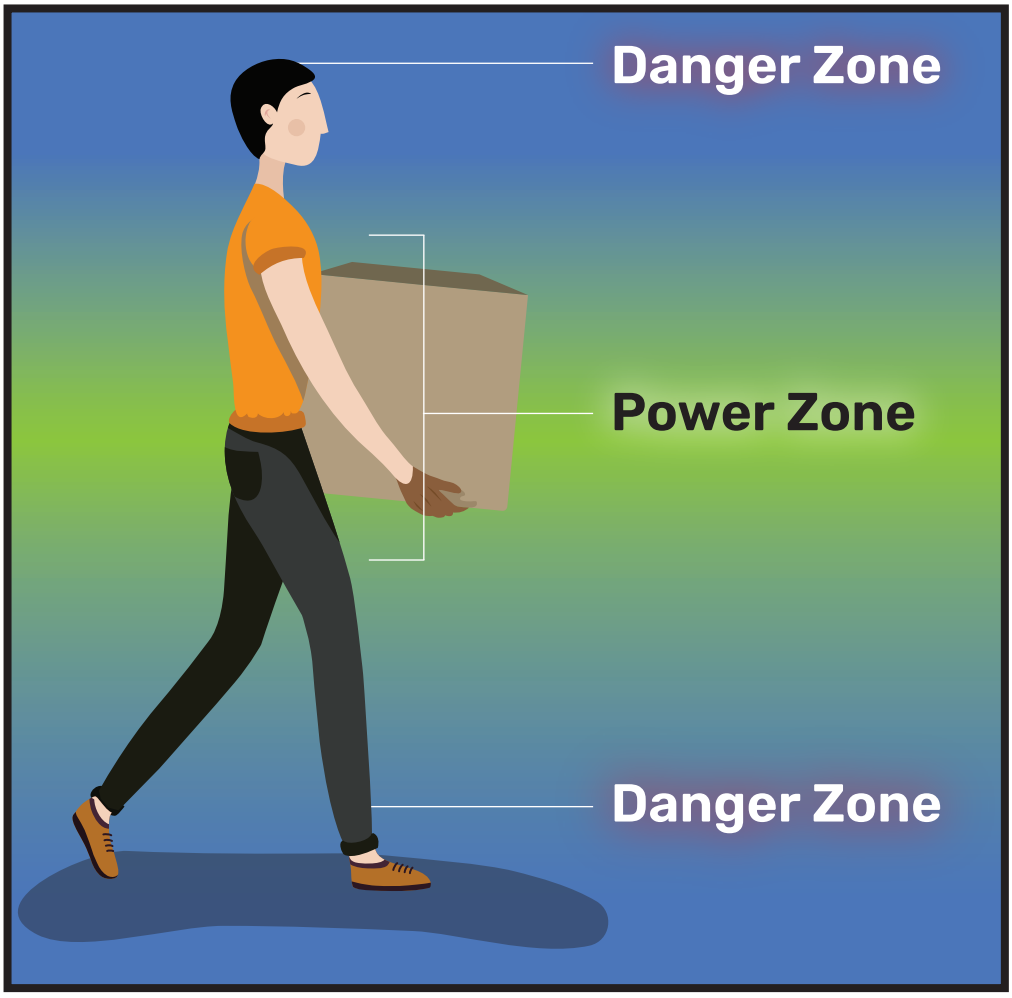
- Ensure you fully understand your employer's Material Handling Safety program.
- Whenever possible, organize your work areas to minimize the need for heavy lifting.
- Before engaging in any heavy lifting activity, warm up with moderate stretching exercises. Avoid aggressive stretching to prevent injury.
- Plan your lifts carefully. Consider the weight of the object, the distance you need to carry it, and your route. Before approaching an object on the floor, gauge its weight by nudging it with your foot or cautiously lifting it. If the object feels too heavy, seek assistance or use a mechanical lifting device, such as a forklift, hand truck, or winch.
- When lifting objects, always do so in the "power zone," which is the area between mid-thigh and mid-chest height. Avoid lifting objects outside of this zone. Use good judgment when handling heavy items; do not attempt to lift anything that is beyond your strength, and exercise extreme caution when lifting objects that exceed 50 lbs.

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- Carry objects close to your body for better balance and control.
- Lift slowly and smoothly to prevent injury.
- Avoid twisting your body. Instead, turn your entire body as a unit when changing direction while carrying a heavy object.
- Whenever possible, move heavy items by pushing or pulling, with pushing being the preferred method.
- Always stand close to the object that you are lifting and be certain that fingers and toes are clear when setting it down.
- Finally, remember to lift with your legs rather than your back to avoid injury.



By incorporating these safe lifting techniques into our daily routines, we not only protect ourselves from potential injuries but also contribute to a culture of safety within our workplace. Remember, taking a few extra moments to assess and lift objects correctly can make a significant difference in our overall well-being.