Back Injury Prevention

There are a number of ways you can reduce stress and strain on your back and prevent injuries. The most important factors in preventing back injuries are using **good body mechanics, avoiding overexertion and poor posture, reducing environmental causes, and maintaining good physical condition.**

- Avoid working in odd, uncomfortable positions, such as when gardening, kneeling, or doing tasks that require you to bend over for long periods of time.
- **STRETCH BEFORE EXERTING:** If you know you will be doing work that might stress your back, take the time to stretch and loosen your muscles before starting, just like an athlete before a workout. This will help you avoid painful strains and sprains.
- **SLOW DOWN:** If you are doing heavy, repetitive lifting, work slowly. Allow yourself more recovery time between lifts. Over working your back will cost you more time later, when you need medical attention or when you find every movement painful.
- Many people have injured their backs because they were afraid to ask for help. **ASK FOR HELP!**
- Good body mechanics includes lifting loads close to your body. Do not lean forward and lift heavy objects far from your body.
- Bend at your knees, instead of your back, when you pick up objects.
- Try not to lift heavy things higher than your waist, or reach for shelves above your head.
- Do not turn or twist at the waist while holding an object. Turn your feet, not your back.
- **REDUCE** the amount of weight lifted. If you are moving books, it is better to load several small boxes rather than one heavy box.
- Avoid sudden movements. Reduce the amount of reaching and twisting you must do.

Concentrate on keeping your shoulders pulled back and your low back straight. Never bend over without bending your knees. Do not sleep on your stomach. Sleep on your side. If you feel tense in your shoulders, neck, or back, ice packs or massage to the area can reduce muscle spasms. A chair with good lumbar (*low back*) support helps protect the back when you sit. If you work at a desk, sit close to your work so you do not need to lean over. Keep your chin tucked in. Keep your neck drawn back. Sit high and close to the steering wheel when you drive. Add a lumbar support to your car seat, if needed. **Avoid prolonged sitting in one position. Get up and move around at least every hour.**

You could injure your back from slipping on a wet floor or ice. Avoid wet and newly mopped surfaces. Make sure ice around your home and office walkways is removed or treated. Sleeping on a mattress that is too soft or too hard can hurt your back. If too soft, consider inserting a large plywood board between your mattress and box spring, or replacing your mattress. Mattresses and box springs should be replaced every 10 to 15 years, depending on the product. Place, store, and position objects up off the floor. That way, you will not need to reach down to pick them up again. Raise or lower shelves, so you do not need to reach or twist your back, neck, and shoulders. Put heavier objects on shelves at waist level, and lighter objects on lower or higher shelves. Use carts and dollies to move objects, rather than carrying them yourself.

Good general physical condition is important for preventing strains, sprains, and other injuries. Exercise regularly and try to develop good tone in your abdominal (*stomach*) muscles. Regular aerobic exercise (walking, jogging, biking, swimming) has been shown to decrease back injuries. Exercises that increase balance and strength can decrease your risk of falling and injuring your back or breaking bones. Exercises such as tai chi and yoga, or any weight-bearing exercise that challenges your balance, are good for increasing balance and strength. Maintaining your ideal body weight is also important for having a healthy back. Contact your caregiver for more information.

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