



Toolbox Talks

Back Injury Prevention



Lifting heavy items and manual materials handling are the leading causes of on the job back injuries. Overexertion and cumulative trauma are the biggest factors in shoulder and back injuries that often result in missed workdays.

OSHA does not have a standard which sets limits on how much weight a person may lift or carry.

If you are just “moving a few supplies from here to there”, or you need to manually move heavier materials, it’s always important to plan your lift and the route you will carry the items. Determine whether or not it’s safe to lift on your own. Ask for help, if needed.

➤ When lifting one load that is heavier than 50 pounds, use at least two people for the lift.

1. When you are ready to perform the lift, get as close as possible and position yourself so your feet are near the base of the item and center yourself in front of the load. Your feet should be spread shoulder width apart.

2. Bend at your knees and squat down, keeping your back as straight as possible. Get a good grip.

3. Grasp the load firmly with both arms and slowly stand up by straightening your legs, pushing with your leg muscles, while maintaining a straight posture with your back. **If you can’t lift slowly, you can’t lift safely.** Keep your elbows close to your sides and keep the load close to your body.

- Do not twist your body as you lift.
- Do not jerk or snatch the load as you lift.
- Don’t bend at the waist to lift or set down a load.
- Don't stack things up so high that you can't see directly in front of you.
- If you begin to lose your grip, set the load down safely and reassess before you try the lift again.

➤ If you must turn while holding or carrying, turn your feet so your whole body turns. Do not turn at the waist. Keep your shoulders in line with your hips as you move.

➤ If carrying smaller materials that may be tricky to hold onto all together, put them into a box so there’s only one thing to carry, and not several items at once.

➤ If items are packed into heavy boxes or containers, consider repacking them so they weigh less.

➤ Do not lift and carry more than you can safely handle. Divide the load to make it lighter.

➤ Do not ask a co-worker to add more items on top of something else you have already lifted.

➤ Carrying loads on one shoulder, under an arm, or in one hand, creates uneven pressure on the spine.

➤ Use a hand truck, pallet jack or forklift to lift and transport heavier items.

